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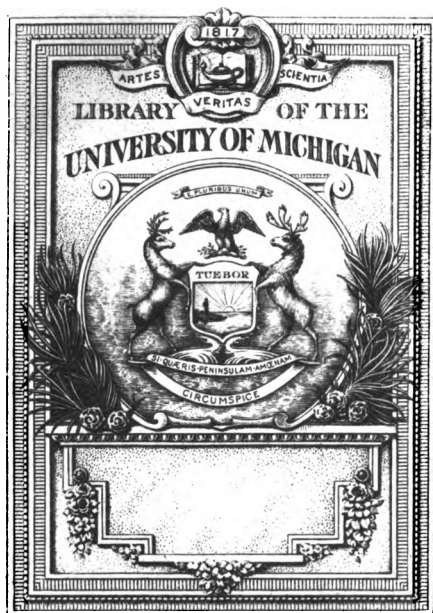
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# Bob Martin's Little Girl

BY

David Christie Murray

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*L. Bigelow*

MARTIN'S LITTLE GIRL





*A. J. Bigelow*

**BOB MARTIN'S LITTLE GIRL**



BOB MARTIN'S

LITTLE GIRL

BY

DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY

AUTHOR OF "JOSEPH'S COAT," "AUNT RACHEL," "RAINBOW  
GOLD," ETC.

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# BOB MARTIN'S LITTLE GIRL.

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## CHAPTER I.

A PAIR of lovers were strolling along an English country lane. The sun had fallen half an hour before, but its beams were still reflected in the zenith, so that through the over-arching boughs of the lofty hedges, and the trees studded about them, there fell a radiance which, though soft and ghost-like, still gave light enough for the man and maid to read each other's faces. The male, as was natural, took ardent advantage of his opportunity, and walking with drooping head and side-long face, kept his eyes fixed upon the girl's half-averted features. She, for her part, stole only an occasional glance at him, each time swiftly withdrawn. She was not pre-eminently pretty, except to a lover's eyes, but her face was full of a vivacious tenderness, and at every fugitive glance she gave him her companion's heart yearned over her.

"You are quite sure you love me?" said the young man, putting the question for the twentieth time that evening.

The girl's shy glance met his for a moment and drooped again. She gave him no further response, but for awhile, at least, he seemed satisfied, and they walked on slowly in the gathering dusk, until at a corner of the lane he put his arm about her waist, and drawing her gently to him, arrested her footsteps. She

laid her head upon his breast with no pretence of coyness as he stood with his arms folded about her shoulders. They were as happy as love and youth could make them, and utterly oblivious of the world about them, as lovers have a right to be. But whilst they stood thus in silence, the noise of a figure crashing through the hedgerow startled them apart, and an intruder landed in the roadway almost at the lover's feet. Of the three the new-comer seemed the most disturbed. He peered through the gloom first at one and then at the other of the pair, upon whose solitude he had unwittingly broken, and once or twice his lips moved as if he would willingly have framed some sort of apology; but never a word he spake. With each second that went by the silence bade fair to be more embarrassing, but the girl recovering her equanimity somewhat, tardily broke the awkward spell.

"Good-evening, Mr. Hetheridge."

The intruder made shift to pluck off his hat and to stammer a response, of which no word was audible. With that he moved away, leaving the lovers alone, in a considerable momentary embarrassment. They had scarce recovered themselves when the intruder was back again, and even in the deepening dusk it was plainly to be seen that he had contrived, short as the interval had been, to throw aside his confusion. He carried his shoulders in decidedly truculent fashion, and grasped his walking-stick by the middle with the air of a man who means business.

"I don't want to interrupt you just now, Mr. Redwood," he began, and there paused to moisten his lips with his tongue. "But if it's convenient to you I should like a word with you before the night's out."

"Very good," returned the lover, catching a shade of the intruder's manner.

"Name your time," said the intruder.

"Will ten o'clock suit you?"

"Perfectly; I'll call on you at that time."

With that he swung upon his heel and marched

rapidly away, his footsteps sounding on the sun-baked road whilst he walked a hundred yards or so, and then falling suddenly into silence as he vaulted a stile and took his way through the deep grass of a hay meadow.

"George," said the girl, laying an imploring hand on her companion's arm; "you won't quarrel, will you?"

"My darling!" George responded, passing an arm about her waist, "I've nothing to quarrel about so far as I know; and I don't think, either, that I'm of a quarrelsome turn of mind."

"You have nothing to quarrel about," the girl answered; "but he has, or at least he thinks he has."

"Oh!" George answered, laughing, "that's an old story, and I should think by this time he's had the sense to forget all about it. We fought about it in our school-days; but we're grown men now, the pair of us, and it *would* be a pity if a pair of sensible people should fall to loggerheads over a dead-and-buried old yarn like that."

"It isn't dead and buried for John Hetheridge," the girl responded. "He believes it to this day. He was speaking to Sir Eustace about it only this morning. He was speaking angrily and noisily, as he does sometimes, and the gardener overheard them. Aunt Mary told me at tea-time this evening. She was afraid that there would always be black blood between them."

"Well, my dear," the young man answered easily, "it takes two to make a quarrel. My father used to say that anger was as catching as the measles; but I've never found it so. If Jack Hetheridge likes to be a fool, he must take his way singly. I promise you he shan't tempt me to keep him company."

They walked on slowly once more, the young man fondling his companion's ungloved hand, and now and then stooping to kiss it. It was almost dark by this time, and each saw the other's face only as a pale featureless blot on the background of the gloom. The girl paused suddenly in her walk, and throwing both



arms about her lover, clung to him tightly; he, raising his hand to her face, found it was wet with tears.

"Why, Ellice darling!" he demanded tenderly; "what's the matter? You don't use being like this. There's no danger in the world. I'm not afraid of Jack Hetheridge, of all men in the world, and you shan't be, if I can help it. Now don't worry, my darling. Dry your eyes and think no more about it."

"There's something else, George," the girl whispered, still clinging to him.

At this George started with a sudden divination.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" he asked, with a certain dryness in his tone. "He's had the cheek to have it out at last, has he?"

"You knew about it?" Ellice asked him, in a whisper which barely reached his ears.

"Why, my dear," George answered, "it stands to reason that I knew about it! When a man loves a girl as much as I do you——" He paused there to emphasize his speech by a hug and a kiss. "When a man loves a girl as much as I do you, it makes him pretty keen to see when anybody else is hanging about after her. I could always be sure that you never liked the fellow, and that if I went single it wouldn't be for his sake. When did you send him about his business, darling?"

"He spoke to me yesterday," she answered, in a shame-stricken whisper, as if she had been confessing a guilty secret.

"So late as that," said George. "I can understand his being a bit rusty, lighting on us in that sudden way a while ago. If I'd come on him in the same way I should have been like enough to have broken his head for him. But then of course it would have been different, for I should have known the beggar wasn't there by your good-will. But don't let's think of him any more, my dear; he shall have his talk to-night, and I'll tell you all about it in the morning. In the mean time, there are lots of pleasanter things in the world

than Jack Hetheridge for you and me to think about, and here's one of them. When's the day to be, my darling? When are you going to make me the happiest man in Worcestershire?"

She put these queries by, and he grew tenderly remonstrant and even a little fiery. This was agreeable, and not lightly to be ended. He grew more ardent still, and frightened her deliciously with his kisses, protestations and embraces, until at last she gave him an answer. They would be married that day—three months, and on that delightful understanding he conducted her to her own garden-gate, bade her a lover-like good-night there, and swung off homeward to meet the intruder of an hour and a half before.

His mother, a quiet, gray-haired old woman, sat knitting in the parlor by the light of a pair of tall candles.

"I've done it at last, mother," he said, as he stooped to kiss her.

"What hast done, lad?" the old lady asked, smiling mildly up at him.

"I doubt," the young fellow answered laughingly, "that you'll want a bit of practice; but you'll have to stand up for one dance, at least, this day three months."

"Oho!" said the old lady. "You've spoke to Ellice?"

"Yes, mother," the young man responded; "I've spoken to Ellice, and we're to be married this day three months."

The mother rose and kissed him, and cried over him a little as tender mothers will sometimes in such a case.

"Who'd ha' thought of little Ellie Greenaway and you a growin' up to be man and wife together? Well, well, she's a pretty gell, George, and a good gell, and I think she'll make you happy. And, if you're as good a husband as you've been a son to me, she's got a prize in ten thousand. You've got your mother's blessin', George, my lad."

This affectionate colloquy was broken in upon by a knocking at the front door.

"There's Jack Hetheridge," said George. "I met him in Barstoe Lane a while ago, and he said he wanted a word with me. He's come for it now, I guess."

"It's private business, George?" his mother asked.

"Yes," said George. "I suppose it's private business. He seems to be in a bit of a hurry for it, too. What are the maids about?"

The knocking at the front door was renewed more loudly than before, and George himself answered the summons.

"There's nobody hard of hearing in this house, Jack," he said as he opened the door. "Come in. We'll have our talk in my own room, if you don't mind. We can be private there."

He led the way through the pitch-dark hall with the assured foot of custom. The visitor followed him gropingly, for a yard or two, then, coming into collision with some unseen piece of furniture, cursed quietly to himself and waited. By-and-bye George appeared in a doorway with a candle, and beckoned to the self-invited guest.

"Now, Jack," he asked, when they were seated together, with the light between them; "what's the word about?"

They were a strongly and even strangely contrasted pair to look at. There was scarcely a difference of a month in their ages, but Hetheridge might easily have been taken for George's senior by half a score of years. His features were thin and puckered, his forehead was prematurely bald, his thin lips ruled a hard, straight line, which dipped suddenly at the corners, and his pale gray eyes were restless and angry-looking as they wandered hither and thither in their shiftiness, as if their owner were seeking something to revenge a spite upon. His hair, his eyebrows, and his little bits of side whiskers were all of the same no-color, but un-

usually crisp and wiry. A mere rime of closely-shaven beard sparkled in the candle-light upon his cheeks and chin. He had a nervous knack of lengthening the jaw and scraping with thumb and finger over this close-trimmed stubble in such a way as to elicit a faintly audible sound. In stature he was slight, but inclined to be tall.

The man who faced him, waiting for the opening of the conversation, was a well-built, deep-chested fellow, with a fresh, unwrinkled face, a kindly aspect, and large bluish-gray eyes that looked as open and honest as the day.

"Now, Jack," he asked a second time, as Hetheridge sat scraping furtively at his lean jaw and sending his vexed glance everywhere but in the direction of his companion—"Now, Jack, what is it?"

Hetheridge seemed at first in no hurry to answer; but suddenly he banged the walking-stick he carried on the unclothed table and leaning forward looked his rival for the first time in the face.

"You're in my way, George Redwood!" he began, with a directness for which an observer would have been unlikely to give him credit.

"Oh!" said George, with a tranquil lifting of the eyebrows; "perhaps you'll tell me how."

"Your father was in my father's way," said Hetheridge, dropping his glance and clutching his stout walking-stick in both hands as though he strove to break it. "Your father was in my father's way, and you're in mine."

"Now, look here, Jack," returned Redwood, "I'm sick of that ridiculous old story. If you've come here to talk about that, you might as well save your breath to cool your porridge."

"Your father," said Hetheridge, "robbed my father of three hundred and fifty acres lying between the brook and Bristoe Lane. The world knows that. You know it as well as I do."

"Yes," George answered, "just as well as you do."

It's a foolish lie, and there's an end of it. Your father wasn't a careful man; mine was. One wasted money; the other made it. Your father drank and racketed his lands away: my father bought 'em with honest money made in honest business. Go where you like, ask anybody who knows the story, and they'll tell you the same thing."

"Your father robbed my father," persisted Hetheridge suddenly.

"I shouldn't be aggrieved," Redwood answered, with a cool contempt, "at anything you might say, even if I supposed that you believed it. Nobody but a born fool could believe that yarn of yours in face of the evidence; and you're not a born fool, Jack Hetheridge."

"Your father robbed my father," Hetheridge said again, "and you've robbed me."

"Is that so?" Redwood asked, in the same tone of cool contempt; "now will you be so good as to tell me how?"

"You know how, well enough," Hetheridge returned. He set his stick across his knee and tugged at it with all his force.

"Well, no," drawled George, with an irritating unconcern. "I can't precisely say I do. Perhaps you'll be good enough to explain the matter."

"Who——" began Hetheridge. He stopped, choking at the word.

"Well," demanded Redwood. "Who—? Who—what?"

"Who came in between me and Ellice Greenaway?" Hetheridge flashed at him, lifting his wrathful eyes suddenly and glaring at George across the table.

"I can answer that question in a minute," George responded. "It was you and Miss Greenaway that came in between you and Miss Greenaway. If you'd been another man, and she'd been another woman, you might have hit it off to perfection."

Hetheridge's face was pale, and his voice shook a little as he spoke.

"You came between us, George Redwood! I've cared for her ever since I was a lad. I've cared about her, and I've let her see it." He spoke as if he had to lay a desperate compulsion on himself to speak at all; and what with the reality of his rage, and the tenseness of the hold with which he clutched the walking-stick across his knee, his whole figure vibrated. "I've been her follower and her servant these fifteen years, since she was a little thing running about in short frocks, and up till now. I never cast a thought on any other girl, and never shall. I've always meant to marry her, and I mean to marry her; and as sure as God's alive, George, the man that crosses me has got to fight me for her."

The man spoke with an anguish so easily to be seen that the successful rival felt a touch of pity.

"Look here, Jack," he said, "what's the use of talking? Suppose we two should fight—suppose you made an end of me; do you think you'd be any nearer marrying Ellice for that? I never heard it was the way to a girl's heart to kill the man she honored with her liking."

"You came in between us," Hetheridge said again, in a dull, tired way this time, "and you'll have to suffer for it. If I can't marry her nobody else shall."

"Man alive!" cried the other, with a half-contemptuous, half-angered laugh; "man alive, you're mad! You got your answer yesterday!"

"She told you that, did she?" cried Hetheridge, wrathfully.

"Yes," said George, "she told me. She had a right to tell me. We shall be married, please God, this day three months."

"You think so," Hetheridge answered. "We shall see."

"Of course, we shall," George answered, dryly. "And now, Jack, if you've no more good sense to lavish on me, I'll say, 'Good-night.' I should suppose that you'd be very satisfying even to a craving stom-

ach, and I've had no appetite for you at any time. Take the dish away, John."

With this touch of rustic irony Redwood rose, opened the door, and indicated the way to his rival by a careless wave of the hand.

"Forewarned's forearmed, they say," said Hetheridge. "Never say I didn't caution you."

"Here, Jack, my lad," said Redwood, slamming the door and setting his broad back against it. "What's all this point to? What are you going to do?"

"I'll tell you what I'm not going to do," said Hetheridge, sitting motionless in his chair. "I'm not going to stand by whilst any man steps in between me and Ellice Greenaway. Take warning, George."

"What do you mean to do?" George asked him. "Do you think I'm a baby to be frightened by the first ugly chap that comes along and pulls faces at me? Come now, what do you mean?"

"Mean!" cried Hetheridge, rising suddenly to his feet and confronting his adversary. "I'll have the life of any man that marries Ellice! Now you've got it straight."

"Yes," said Redwood, with an air of weary resignation; "we've got it straight at last; and now, get out of my house."

Hetheridge obeyed the cool gesture of dismissal, but turned in the doorway for a final word.

"Don't forget, George. Think of what I've told you."

"I shan't burden my mind with any such sickly nonsense," Redwood answered; and so saying, he took the candle from the table and conducted his rival to the door.

## CHAPTER II.

HETHERIDGE walked out into the darkness in a mood sullenly bitter. He swung rapidly along by the garden path, and, mistaking by a yard or two the position of the gate, walked full-tilt against it, abrading wrists and knees. The unexpected pain, slight as it was, turned his sullenness to a sudden fury, and wheeling round toward the house, he cursed it and its inmates aloud, with both smarting hands quivering in the air. He found the exercise for the moment so congenial and absorbing that he was quite blind and deaf to his surroundings, until he was awakened to them by the crook of a walking-stick upon his shoulder, and the sound of a voice almost at his ear.

"Come, come, Hetheridge," said the voice; "this is a poor sort of work for a Christian man. What's the matter with you?"

Hetheridge knew the speaker almost at the first word, and stayed the torrent of his objurgations.

"You'd better get away from here," said the newcomer in a tone of authority.

"Look here, Sir Eustace," Hetheridge began, with propitiative expostulatory whine, in comic contrast with his late full-throated anathema.

"But I won't look there!" said the authoritative one, and fixing the crook of his walking-stick in Hetheridge's collar he drew him calmly outside the gate, and with a mere injunction to him to follow, led the way along the lane for a hundred yards or so. By this time the wrathful man's eyes were accustomed to the darkness, and when Sir Eustace stopped, Hetheridge arrested his own footsteps also, and the two,



facing each other, could dimly read each the expression of the other's countenance.

"Now!" said the baronet, who was a mighty man in those parts, and accustomed to having his own way with all and sundry, "I told you this morning you were making an ass of yourself, and that I'd stand no more of it. I dare undertake to say that there isn't a grown man or woman within five miles who doesn't know the rights and wrongs of your case; and there isn't one of them who, being asked, wouldn't tell you that you are a fool. Old Redwood no more robbed your father than I did, or you did, or the man in the moon did."

"I know better, Sir Eustace," said Hetheridge doggedly.

"Ah," said Sir Eustace, "you're a man with a crank. You're laboring under a delusion, and if you don't take care it may lead you into mischief. I don't know, after what I have heard to-night, that I shouldn't be justified in advising young Redwood to lay an information against you. March home now, and let me see you in the morning. I'll have none of this dangerous madness in my neighborhood, if I can help it."

"Good-night, Sir Eustace," said the young man humbly.

"Good-night," said the baronet, and stood watching the retreating figure until it melted into the shadows and was lost. Then he, too, set out for home. Coming in a little while to the lodge-gates of his own park, he bade the lodge-keeper fasten up for the night, and, lighting a cigar, strolled slowly along the drive, well pleased with himself as a man who had justly asserted his own importance and arrested a dangerous agent. He went to bed in the same calm complacency, and in the morning awaited Hetheridge's arrival. The morning wore away, and the young man failed to put in an appearance. Luncheon-time came, but still no Hetheridge. This was flat *lese-majesty*, and at three o'clock Sir Eustace ordered his horse and rode out in quest of the recusant. He found him at his own homestead, a

mile or thereabouts from the hall—a rambling, gabled, thatched old tenement, which had been in the course of so many generations so rebuilt in places, and so added to, that it looked as if the houses of a hamlet had been heaped and squeezed together.

Hetheridge stood in the porch legged and spurred as if fresh from the saddle. He carried a riding-switch in one hand, and at sight of the approaching magnate hung his head and whipped at his corduroy legs with an air of dogged abstraction. Sir Eustace came riding down the path as if he would ride into the house, and, checking his horse suddenly, looked wrathfully down at the yeoman.

“Here you are!” he said curtly.

“Yes,” Hetheridge answered; “here I am, as you say, Sir Eustace.”

He lifted his dogged face as he spoke, and the baronet guessed by the flush upon his forehead, and a certain gloomy film of anger in his eyes, that he had been drinking.

“I told ‘you,’” he said, “that I expected to see you this morning.”

“I’m aware of that, Sir Eustace,” the young man answered; “but I’ve had other work on hand. There’s no such a thing as justice in this part of the world for me, and I’ve made up my mind to clear out of it. I rode over to Worcester this morning, and I’ve put the land on the market. This old bundle of bricks and mortar——” He struck the lintel with his riding-whip as he spoke. “This old bundle of bricks and mortar goes with it. I’m going to Australia! I can’t stand this —— old country any longer, and I’m off.”

“Well,” said Sir Eustace, “it’s about the best thing you could do, Hetheridge. I hope we shall have no folly or violence on your part in the mean time. As for the land you’ve resolved to part with——”

“Oh! I’ve quite made up my mind about that, Sir Eustace,” Hetheridge answered, flogging at his legs with angry emphasis.

"I'll make you a bid for it," the baronet, pursued. "It lies up close to my own all along. You'd better see Raymond, or get your solicitor to see him, and arrange a price with him."

"Very well, Sir Eustace," the young man answered in a voice slightly husky and unsteady; "it's no care of mine who has it so long as it doesn't go into George Redwood's hands."

"Do you mean to stay on here in the mean time?" Sir Eustace asked him.

"No," said the young fellow defiantly; "I'm going up to London. I'm going to have a look at The Smoke. I can't breathe down here. I want to go somewhere where I can get fair play."

"Well, well," said the baronet, forbearing to argue with him. "I dare say you're doing the wisest thing. You'll call and see me before you go."

"I don't know about that, Sir Eustace," the other answered. "There's nobody who'll be any the better for my good-bys, or any the worse for going without 'em. I've neither wife nor kin, nor chick nor child, and where I go or what becomes of me matters to nobody."

If the young man had paid fewer visits to the bottle in the course of the day, the bitterness of his heart might have been less outspoken; but even as things stood, it was obvious that he felt keenly; and the baronet, who, though a bit of an autocrat, was a kindly man enough in the main, was sorry for him. He stooped down from his saddle, and laid a friendly hand upon the youngster's shoulder.

"Come, come," he said, "you'll find plenty of friends if you look for them, or even if you let them come without looking for them. The world's wide, my lad, and there are lots of good men and pretty girls in it."

Whether from a fear of breaking down, or in resentment of the friendly voice and hand, Hetheridge turned and walked straight into the house without a word. Sir Eustace being thus left alone saw nothing for it

but to turn his horse's head homeward, and leave the unhappy young fellow to his own devices. On the whole, he was inclined to think that things were turning out well. He had often thought, and had cause enough for thinking, that Hetheridge was likely to be dangerous. Always inclined to be an ill-conditioned fellow, the young man had of late shown so menacing a disposition that Sir Eustace had more than once felt nervous about him. The baronet regarded himself as the divinely-appointed caretaker of that country-side, and not being a man who sought for trouble, was glad to know that the one disturbing element he had to deal with was withdrawing from his sphere.

As for the yeoman, whose own wrong-headedness and jealousy uprooted him from his native soil, he felt as wrathful, as injured, and as desolate, as if every one of his mad and bitter fancies had been absolutely true in fact. It gave an added pang to the sting of his injuries to know that not a living soul but himself believed in them. The whole world was in a conspiracy against him. People laughed or jeered or turned away in fatigue when he talked of the family wrongs the Redwoods had inflicted on his house.

From long brooding, the sense of injury had grown to be something like a mania with Hetheridge, and by night and by day, for many a night and day long past, he felt that he could have murdered Redwood if the thing could only have been done with safety. He had killed him in fancy a hundred times, in almost as many different ways, and had found a tantalizing joy in the contemplation of the possibility. But he was of that not uncommon tribe who desire to have their cake and eat it, and the memory of the face of a criminal whom he had seen and heard condemned to death at the country assizes was often potent with him. To have had George Redwood wiped off the face of the earth would have been a prodigious satisfaction—a joy the like of which few men are able in the course

of their whole lives to contemplate. But he, John Hetheridge, must keep alive to enjoy the knowledge of his enemy's death; and so for once in a way the vision of the hangman, and that only, kept hands that burned to be criminal from the stain of murder.

There were two passions surging in the man's heart, and each as fierce and agonizing as the other. Hate fed love, and love strengthened hate until, with the conflict of the two, the hapless wretch whose heart these gigantic passions took for their playground, was well-nigh beside himself. He could never have loved as passionately as he did had his rival been other than the man he hated with so much intensity; nor could his hate have risen to its own dimensions without the sense of a rivalry to feed it. In resolving to uproot himself and to seek out a new land, he was running to the only ark of safety he could see. To stay on and look at his rival's happiness meant the certainty of murder soon or late; and bitter as life was to him, he set too high a value upon it to throw it away for the sake of a joy which, though fiercely coveted, was certain to be fleeting.

"I'm not going to hang for the blackguard," mused John Hetheridge; "but if ever I do see my way to have his life, and yet get off scot-free, I'll do it. Let him look out for himself. I'll bide my time. I'll find my chance if I wait fifty years for it." He knew the threat was empty, even while he made it, and his own impotence goaded and exasperated him almost beyond endurance.

He fulfilled one part of his promise to himself, and went to London; but the Black Curate sat behind him all the way, and went with him about the town, the unceasing companion of his waking hours, and many a dreadful night the inspirer of his dreams. Millions of men have tried the futile experiment, but no man has ever dodged his shadow yet. He nursed his hatred, and with it he nursed his misery. The city had for him a heavier and completer solitude than his own

lonely kinless home had ever brought him. He knew nobody, and his rawed heart was scratched a hundred times a day by the crowd which passed him heedlessly, knowing and caring nothing of his miseries, his passion, his hatred, his despair.

Sir Eustace Wyncome's solicitor had, of course, a own agent, and through his hands went Hetheridge's business for the time being. Sir Eustace offered a fair value for the farm, and after a little haggling Hetheridge accepted the bid. He found himself in possession of a sum of money which looked unending, and, for a week or two, plunged into wild extravagances. But he soon took fright at these, and began to atone for them by a niggardly carefulness. All the while, the thought of the approaching marriage haunted him. He was powerless to arrest it or delay it, except by the one means he dared not take.

He had heard no news or word from home except through his man of business. There was nobody to whom he cared to write, and nobody who seemed to care to write to him. The goods of the old house had gone under the hammer without reserve. He had had his reckoning with the auctioneer, and there was nothing to delay him further. He was absolutely unencumbered—free to go where and when he wanted; yet something held him back, and twice he turned away from the offices of the shipping company without taking the passage he had meant to purchase.

The summer was ended and over; the days were drawing in and growing chilly; the great city was buried in the yellow cloud of its first autumn fog; and the morrow was the day which had been fixed for George Redwood's marriage. Hetheridge had never had that date out of mind, and now, moved by he knew not what impulse—much as men in fierce agony have been known to beat and tear their wounds—he resolved on going home and being himself a witness of the ceremony. As the train bore him from the fog of London into the crisper, clearer country air, he was

tormented by a disproportioned fear lest the time should have been antedated or postponed. It became to him, somehow, an essential thing that he should see the marriage with his own eyes, and should with his own ears hear the words which bound George Redwood and Ellice Greenaway together. His fit of extravagance on first coming into his money had sent him to a fashionable West End tailor, and he was attired unlike his old self, and was conscious of the change. There was but little difference between them to the eye of a man of city breeding; but there are degrees in rusticity, and Hetheridge had always felt himself to be his rival's superior in manner and the art of dress. There was a sore and angry little triumph in his mind at the thought that in these respects at least he could far outshine his rival; and real as hate, and love, and despair, all were to him, this trivial vanity for the time being was as important to him as all of them together.

He put up at the sign of the Black Bull, the one respectable hostel of the place, and found himself the object of an unwelcome curiosity there. He sat that night in all the panoply of his town splendor in the little bar parlor, and fraternized with the little knot of ancient cronies.

"Be'st here to see the wedding?" one of them demanded, with that brutality of directness which characterizes the British yokel above all other men on earth.

Hetheridge winced, but hid the wince with a swagger, drained his steaming glass of brandy-and-water with a flourish, and slapped the tumbler on the table so noisily as to break its stem.

"Yes," he responded roysteringly. "I'm here to see the wedding, and I'll drink the bride's good health. And now, Bowen," he cried to the landlord, "come here, and fill all these gentlemen's glasses. Don't fear to order what you like, gentlemen. I'm here to pay for them. Miss Greenaway's virtues and

beauty are worthy of a rousing toast, as I think you'll all agree. What do you say to a glass of champagne wine, now? Come now, I'll take no nay. Champagne wine it shall be. Bring a couple of bottles, landlord, and set out a glass for yourself."

The ancient cronies rubbed their hands and looked askance one upon another at this town-bred magnificence. Hetheridge, in the midst of all the passion and excitement which consumed him, was yet agreeably assured that the handiwork of the West End tailor was not without its effect upon the country crowd.

"There's no man," he said, swaggering in his chair and fingering a cigar in the open box before him, "there's no man in the world'll say as Miss Ellice Greenaway isn't worthy of a drink upon her bridal eve."

The landlord entering at this juncture, Hetheridge swaggered to his feet, lit his cigar at the gas with the air of a man to whom that operation was usual and accustomed. The first bottle being opened, he gave out the health noisily, and called for three cheers for it. The cheers were given, and the oldsters moved their jaws doubtfully over the flavor of the wine, which was new to every man of them, and less estimable, in spite of its royal reputation, than the flavor of hot brown brandy, sugared, and with a slice of lemon in it.

"Miss Greenaway!" shouted Hetheridge.

"Miss Greenaway!" the ancient cronies chorused.

"And," piped one, "her man as is to be!"

Hetheridge threw a poisonous glance at him, but answered, "Her man that is to be." As the words left his lips, George Redwood entered, bluff and stalwart. He lifted his eyebrows in momentary surprise at Hetheridge's presence there, but nodded a smiling salutation round.

"Sit down, Mr. Redwood; sit down," cried the landlord. "Here's Mr. Hetheridge a-drinking your lady's health, and yours, sir."



"I take that kindly of you, Jack," said Redwood, reaching out a hand to his old companion; "and I hope that whatever's past between us is buried and done with."

Hetheridge gave his hand in silence, but wrung Redwood's hard. It was plain to see that he was moved, though in what fashion none of the observers could define. He registered an oath in that hand-clasp which, had he spoken it, would have brought every man to his feet in horror; but he looked his enemy and rival in the face and said:

"It's buried, George; say no more about it."

### CHAPTER III.

HETHERIDGE appeared at the parish church next morning, and watched the wedding ceremony through. He shook hands with the bridegroom in the vestry, and made a clumsy advance toward kissing the bride in rustic fashion. Ellice drew back from him in alarm, but Redwood, clapping his old acquaintance on the shoulder, brought him forward again, and insisted on the salute. The newly-made bride offered a cheek as cold as stone, and Hetheridge set his lips to it. The girl shivered with repulsion, and the chill of her cheek seemed to pierce the rejected suitor's marrow. As a mere matter of form, and because there were lookers-on about them, he had kissed the forehead of his dead mother, years before, as she lay in her coffin attired for her last rest. The memory of that clay-cold kiss had haunted him ever since, and the only caress he had ever been permitted to offer his sweetheart since she came to girlhood brought it vividly and terribly to his mind.

He left the church with some abruptness, and drove to the railway station three hours before the time fixed for the departure of the London train. The lonely waiting, spent in striding up and down the little unpeopled platform, gave him ample time in which to regret his final unnecessary visit to his native place. The man's position was tragic, and but for the one awful motive which inspired him would have been altogether pitiable. But the cry of his heart—as sincere a prayer as ever yet was offered—was that he might find some safe and hidden opportunity for murder. His despair of that, his recognition of the sheer impossibility of it whilst he burned, and yearned

and only groaned for it, made up the greater part of his torments.

The green-corduroyed porter came whistling over the fields at last, jingling his keys in his hand, and twenty minutes later the lonely traveller took the lumbering country train for London. As he journeyed on, one thought became clearer and more clear to him, and seemed to bear with it a dim promise of a far-off hope of peace. He could put the width of the world between himself and that impossible passion for revenge which burned and hurt him so, and perhaps in the course of time the pain might die. Out of this grew a wild hurry to be away from England. He longed to count the leagues of sea which would place barrier after barrier against his denied desire.

For a whole week his days and nights were fevered, and whatever he did in the enforced time of waiting for his ship was done with a dreadful hurry and precipitation. He was aboard at last, the only soul in the whole crowded vessel who had no good-bys to say. The decks were swarming until the tug cast off below Gravesend, when the early night began to fall, and almost everybody went below. Hetheridge kept his place at the vessel's side, watching with gloomy eyes the occasional twinkling lights ashore. He seemed to himself to have no heart for anything just then, neither for love nor for hate, nor even for self-pity. As the night wore on he grew ghastly ill, but even then refused to stir from his place until he could stand no longer, and was unceremoniously bundled below by a brace of stewards.

There followed three or four days of bodily anguish severe enough to overwhelm all mental pains, and when after this he came to the deck to look on smiling skies and smiling sea, he found himself already in a balmier air than he had left behind. At first he thought, and with apparent reason, that he had left the greater part of his troubles in the rear; but as the sense of health and ease once more became familiar, the old unsatis-

fied passion laid upon him a hand as exigent as ever. Other emigrants made friends, assorted themselves into groups and cliques, had interests, affections, little animosities. He, of all the crowd, was lonely. His angry face and his constant solitude made him disagreeably noticeable to his fellow-passengers, and at his coming conversation flagged and sport languished. He thought himself a blight upon the ship, and in this respect, at least, every man, woman, and child aboard was of his way of thinking.

It was quite natural that he should lay this at his enemy's door, with all the other mad and unfounded charges he had already heaped there. But for George Redwood, he told himself, he might have been married and happy, in place of being the shunned and solitary wretch he was. But for George Redwood's father, his own father might have lived to a wealthy and honored old age, in place of being brought half-way to beggary and dying broken-hearted in the prime of life. That there was no faintest foundation in fact on which to build these theories made no difference. That he had in his secret heart rather welcomed his father's death than otherwise as bringing him at once to manhood, freedom, and the possession of his own, made no difference either. Outside this groundless hate the man was probably as sane as any one in a thousand, but the passion itself had grown to be a madness. He was possessed by it. Every cranny of his nature seemed filled with the leprous distilment of its poison. It made him a loathing to himself, his days a horror, and his nights a burden; and yet there was nothing in the riches of the whole wide world which could have tempted him to part from it.

The long journey was over, and he left his floating home, as he had left his native land, with no farewells to say, no voice to wish him God-speed.

There were not many men who at that time had landed in Australia with a better provision in mere money than John Hetheridge. He had a rare clear

head for business, and in a very little while began to look intelligently on a dozen or two of the countless schemes which were industriously kept a-boiling in Melbourne early in the fifties. Here again for a while the change in his life, the new interests and the new environment, seemed to build a wall between his miseries and himself. He made money hand over hand, and the excitement of business enterprise would sometimes banish George Redwood from his mind; but before he knew it the barrier wall had crumbled into nothing, the new mode of life had become habitual, and he and his reasonless rage lived together as of old.

Two years went by, in which there is nothing to be chronicled but ups and downs of business affairs, resulting in the main in Hetheridge's aggrandizement. There were ebbs and flows, of course—petty currents, which veered hither and thither—but the main tide bore him on till he saw before him the prospect of such wealth as he had never hitherto dared to dream of.

And hereabouts a thing happened which must needs be told.

A little after Christmas-time, he was far away up country on a solitary journey in pursuit of one of the many business enterprises in which he was engaged. The sun flamed down with an almost intolerable heat, and he drove through a forest in which reigned a silence like that of the tomb. The baked earth opened its gaping thirsty lips in millions of places. The shadeless gums refused shelter to man or beast, and the smaller shrubs and such forest herbage as the spring-time of the year could have shown were parched almost to tinder. The buggy threaded in and out among the gray boles of the trees, and an ignorant observer might have supposed the man lost and driving at random. There was no track or semblance of a track, but he was following trustworthy directions, and an occasional reference to a pocket compass kept his mind at ease. At high noon, when he and his horse

were alike weary, he came upon a clearing, where the jagged and blackened stumps of countless trees gave an indescribably gap-toothed and dreary look to the expanse before him. In the middle of the clearing was a hut of a single story, and this he knew to be his halting-place.

When he alighted and called he elicited no response; but as he busied himself in releasing his horse from the buggy, he shouted anew, and this time was answered by the weeping voice of a child. He entered at the door of the low-browed shanty, and his foot tripping upon something in the sudden dusk, he stumbled forward, and would have fallen but that his outstretched hands rested upon a rough table. The child's cry rang through the room. The shutters of the rough unglazed windows were closed. He thrust one of them open with the butt of his driving-whip, and as the light poured in he drew himself back from the table which had arrested his fall, and looked at the object which had tripped him. As his eye fell upon it he recoiled a pace with suddenly outstretched hands, and so stood staring down in a fixed horror until his arms fell gradually to his side. There lay at his feet the dead body of a man, the colorless face writhen as if with a last spasm of pain! The hands were thrown wide abroad, and opened palm upward, and the sole of one foot rested flat upon the earthen floor, the knee cocking upward with a grotesque impertinent suggestion of life and effort.

The child's voice shrilled from a darkened corner, but Hetheridge paid no heed to it for the moment. When he had overcome the first shock of terrified surprise, he knelt down by the prostrate figure and gingerly lifted one of the outstretched arms by a rag of the soiled flannel shirt. The latter gave way and the arm dropped heavily. Forcing himself against his own repugnance, Hetheridge examined the body. The man to all appearance was well nourished, and looked as if only an hour or two ago he must have seemed an

unusually stalwart fellow. There was no sign of violence to be seen about him as he lay; but the searcher's hand came away from the dead man's side with blood upon it. It had never before fallen to his lot to see a man who had died by violence, and he felt a horror of the poor dead body which he found it hard to conquer. But his curiosity, mixed, perhaps, with some humane feeling, forced him on, and with some ado he turned the corpse on its face. The cause of death was instantly apparent. The broken shaft of a black fellow's spear came to sight, and the head of it, driven more deeply by the fall, still projected from between the shoulders. Hetheridge laid the body in decent posture, and covered the face with a coarse jack-towel which hung behind the door.

All this time the unheeded child had cried lustily; but he now turned to it. It lay upon a rough cot, with almost naked limbs. By its side was a rough stone feeding-bottle, with a wooden plug in its centre, packed in with a rag of newspaper, and at one end a mumbled teat of wash-leather, still soft and wet from its last contact with the infant's lips. Hetheridge knew little enough of babies and their ways, but the first thing to be done was obvious. He thrust the teat gently between the infant's lips, and the crying ceased instantly; the chubby hands grasped at the bottle, and the moist and rosy lips sucked away at it with intense and immediate satisfaction.

And now what was to be done? The next halting-place was more than a score of miles away. It was imperative to reach it before nightfall, and inadvisable to travel until the heat of the day would be somewhat assuaged. With many a backward or sidelong glance at the body on the floor, broad daylight as it was, Hetheridge foraged about the hut, with little result in the way of discovery. He found tea and a quantity of coarse brown sugar, and remembering to have seen outside a blackened and battered billy suspended from a crooked branch stuck in the cleft of a

charred tree, he returned into the open air to make preparations for a meal. A well-worn track led him to a creek, and there he washed and refilled the vessel. Returning, he lit a fire below it and sat down in the doorway until the water should boil. The presence of the dead body gave him an eerie feeling, but the shadow was cool and gave a pleasant refuge from the devouring heat of the sun. The horse had already strayed under a flat thatch, supported by the side of the hut and a stick at each outer corner, and had disposed of a half-bucket of tepid water which had been brought up for domestic purposes earlier in the day.

Dead quiet reigned everywhere—a silence so profound that it seemed to demand to be listened to until a thousand humming and singing noises swarmed in it. Beyond the space of blackened logs the bush glittered desolate in the dreadful sunshine, each polished leaf seeming to return the light like a mirror. The gaunt shabbiness of the great pale-gray trunks looked unspeakably dreary. The land sloped upward before the door of the hut, and for mile on mile the blue-gray masses of foliage, grayer and bluer as the distance grew, loomed before the watcher's eyes, until the feeling of his own remoteness from the world began to terrify him. Even the presence of a child was something to him, though not much. It was at least a living thing and human in the midst of that oppressive solitude, with death at the heart of it.

Hetheridge rose from the upturned tea-chest on which he had been sitting, and stooped over the infant on its cot. The little creature crowed and gurgled at him and held up a hand. He put a doubtful finger into its grasp, and the child held on firmly to it and crowed again. Hetheridge knelt by the side of the cot and scanned the baby with more interest than he had felt in any such mite of humanity before. The callow little head was covered with hair of a pale golden color, like the finest spun silk. The cheeks glowed and the eyes sparkled with health. The wet lips glittered,



and beyond them shone two or three tiniest beginnings of teeth. The baby's eyes were large and brown. There was a look of Ellice in them, the man thought, with the first touch of tenderness which had assailed him for this many a day.

"I shall have to carry the brat on, I suppose?" he muttered to himself. "It's an infernal nuisance, but I suppose it can't be helped."

His face belied his words, though it did not come easy to him to look kindly. He was ashamed of himself for feeling kindly, as men who have been very long accustomed to putting all gentleness out of their thoughts are apt to be. He felt bound to rebuke himself for a sentiment so unaccustomed.

"—— the kid!" he said, therefore. "What am I to do with a squalling brat not twelve months old?"

The baby accepted the anathema with a new gurgle of delight, and held closer on to the man's index finger. Hetheridge knelt in a state of total embarrassment. The unexpected flatteries of a duchess could scarcely have disturbed him more. But circumstances forced his hand, and he felt bound to make some answering advances. He chucked the soft chin with the forefinger of the hand he had at liberty, and made a feeble attempt to imitate some meaningless sound of endearment such as he had heard nurses address to an infant charge. The child laughed once more, but at that instant the thought of the dead man lying so close behind him came upon him with as swift a terror as if a sudden hand had been raised against his life. He rose abruptly to his feet, and ran out into the open air; and once more the solitude was horrible to him. The child, startled by his sudden movement, wailed again; but five minutes went by before he could find courage to re-enter the hut.

The day wore on a little, and the heat became a trifle less intense. Hetheridge reharnessed the horse, and before setting out researched the hut to find provision for the child. In a corner of the room on the

floor, and under the shadow of a home-made table, he found a basin of goat's milk, from which he replenished the child's bottle. He found, also, a hammer and a few tacks, and by the aid of these, with a piece of drapery torn from the child's cot, he rigged up a sort of awning between the splash-board of the buggy and the seat, and beneath its shelter he bestowed the infant. He had already driven a hundred yards from the lonely shanty, when an impulse which he did not trouble to define impelled him to retrace his way and close the shutter he had thrown aside and the door, thus leaving the dead man to a darkness and silence which seemed in some vague way proper and becoming to him.

When, a little after sundown, with only light enough to feel his way by, he reached his next halting-place, he told the story of his discovery, and two of the station hands were instructed to ride over with mattock and spade, with orders for the decent interment of the body. Hetheridge learned no more of the dead man than this: His name was Martin. He and his wife had dared the wilderness together. A child had been born to them in the great solitude they had chosen as their abiding-place. The mother had died nine months later, and the man from that hour had toiled on alone until death at the hand of some skulking black fellow had laid him low.

The squatter, whose guest Hetheridge was that night, had a wife—a buxom, amiable soul, whose heart went out to the orphaned child as soon as she had heard its story.

"There's room in the house for more than one," she said, indicating a sturdy little sun-browned fellow of her own; "and in a year or two they'd be companions."

"She's mine," said Hetheridge, almost fiercely. "I've neither kith nor kin, nor chick nor child. I'm not likely to marry, and I'm worth a quarter of a million, maybe more. I'll make myself answerable for the child."

He went on next morning, and in a day or two found himself within touch of civilization. In a week he reached home, with a young person of unexceptionable antecedents engaged as care-taker for the orphan waif. Hetheridge's respectable housekeeper—a woman who confessed to middle age, and who might honestly have confessed to something more—bucked at the intrusion of this unknown feminine quantity, and resented the presence of the baby. Hetheridge, who by this time had returned to his usual stern gloom of manner, pointed to the door.

"That's the way out," he said. "You can take it, Mrs. Brown, or do my bidding. Either course is open to you, and whichever you may take it'll be a matter of the most perfect indifference to me."

"I was bred," began the lady, "in the Presbeetee-rian church——"

"I don't care," returned Hetheridge, "one hang where you were bred! You can do my bidding, or you can leave my house. You can take your money out of that, and bring me the change."

He slammed a little handful of hastily-counted bank-notes upon the table, and flourished a hand of master-ship above them. The Presbyterian lady temporized.

"I'm no saying——"

"You're not wanted to say anything," responded her master; "you can stay or go, just as you please; only make up your mind about it without loss of time."

"Ye'll forgiv me, perhaps," demanded the cautious dame, "for asking whose the child is?"

"The child's mine!" her employer snapped at her with a show of temper unusual to him.

"Aweel," said the housekeeper, "in that case——"

She slid the notes across the table toward her employer.

"And what might be the pretty little creature's name?"

Hetheridge glared at her for a moment without response.

"The name?" said the housekeeper. "We'll be wanting a name to call her by."

"Her name?" said Hetheridge, passing a hand across his forehead, as if to smooth away some troubled fancy. "Her name? Didn't I tell you that? Her name is Ellice!"

## CHAPTER IV.

FOR miles and miles—as far, indeed, as the eye could see—the country was covered with a sparse open-growing scrub which rarely rose higher than a man's shoulder. The district was void of water, the heat was broiling, the dry earth gaped. A solitary swagsman toiled along a faintly-defined track which ran with many zigzags through the whole length of this barren and prodigious wilderness. His bare arms, his huge hands, his exposed chest and neck, his very beard and hair were sunburnt. His face was so darkened by exposure to sun and air that at a first glance his nationality might have seemed doubtful; but his eyes were of a bright and cheery blue, and where the sun had left any color to speak of in his beard the tinge was yellow. The man's swag was heavy, and the way broken and toilsome, but he marched on with an apparent unbroken cheerfulness. The desert rose and sank before him in long undulations, and presented an eternity of sameness. Not another insect appeared in sight, but he moved in the midst of a whirling pillar of flies which, with the indifference bred of long custom, he stoically disregarded.

After long hours of marching, he reached the top of a knoll which he had alternately lost and sighted since early morning, and there stood a moment to press the streaming perspiration from his forehead with the palm of a sunburnt hand. Then he drew a great breath, brushed aside the cloud of insects for a clearer view, and waved his right arm with a gesture of greeting. Two miles away, or thereabouts, lay a homestead with tilled fields about it, and here and there a patch of green. These scattered patches looked each no larger

than a handkerchief from that distance, but they were wonderfully rich and vivid by contrast with the surrounding yellows and bluish-grays; and as they grew in size with his nearer approach the wayfarer kept a constant eye upon one or the other of them, absorbing all the refreshment they afforded.

In the fenced yard, beside the homestead which the wayfarer reached some half-hour after his first sight of it, a burly man sat in the shadow and smoked his pipe. A fat hog slumbered at his feet, and now and then the burly man scratched the porker's well-fleshed ribs with a bit of lath. The swagsman, leaning his brown arms on the fence in the baking sunlight, looked on at this scene of sweet domesticity in silence for a full minute. The burly man heard his footstep, and was conscious of his presence, but never raised an eye. He scratched his hog, and the hog responded to this friendly attention by a grunt of sleepy contentment. There was something almost idyllic in the scene, and the swagsman seemed loath to break upon its sentiment.

"I say, mate," he said at length.

"Hullo!" the burly man responded, still placidly scratching the placid porker.

"You'd have a call, I fancy, four weeks ago to-day. Man in a buggy. Had a kid with him. A little girl."

"That's so," said the burly man, looking around for the first time. "What about him?"

"He came from out Yallala way," says the swagsman, nodding his head to indicate the direction from which he himself had travelled.

"So he said," the burly man responded.

"Went straight on?" the swagsman asked.

"Straight on," said the burly man. "Have a liquor?"

"Cold tea?" said the swagsman interrogatively.

"If you like," the other answered.

The swagsman straightened himself with a little air of effort, and walked to the gate. His host opened it and motioned him toward the shadowed veranda, and

himself disappearing into the house, presently returned with a great billy of cold tea, two tin pannikins, and a black bottle. He made a second entry, and came back with a bowl of coarse brown sugar. The swagsman threw down his burden and sat upon it, smearing the sweat from his face with the inside of his great arm.

"It's warm," he said, fanning himself with his tattered felt broad-brim.

"So's hell," the burly man responded, and filled the pannikins. "Have a stick in it?" he asked, holding up the black bottle to illustrate a metaphor already clear to his companion's understanding.

"Not a stick," returned the swagsman; "a twig if you like and a little 'un at that."

The host handed the bottle, and, drawing the cork with his teeth, the visitor helped himself less modestly than his speech had seemed to promise.

"Smoke?" said the host, holding up a plug of very black tobacco.

The visitor nodded, and drawing a short well-blackened clay from his waistband, knocked out the ashes it contained into the palm of his great hand; then drawing forth a heavy clasp-knife shredded a portion of tobacco from the proffered stick and filled his pipe. He set the old ashes carefully on top and pressed them down to the last grain. The host watched him with an air of approval, and nodded when the packing of the pipe was finished.

"It lights easier that way," he said, with great gravity; "and, besides that, it's a saving."

Then he in turn filled his own pipe, and the two smoked and sipped in silence for several minutes.

"Chap you're after," said the host, "may be a longish way ahead by this time."

"Yes," said the other; "a longish way, most likely. I shall come across him, though, I've no manner of a doubt. Did you put him up here?"

"Yes, he stayed the night."

"You saw the kid?" the visitor asked somewhat

eagerly. The other nodded. "Pretty little kid, wasn't she? Prettiest little kid I ever saw, I think." The host nodded again. "Look here, mate," the visitor continued, leaning forward: "Did the chap happen to mention his own name?"

"What do you happen to want him for?" the host inquired.

"Well, I'll tell you," said the swagsman; "it's like this." He laid down his pipe upon the veranda, and assumed the air of one who is about to be prolix and specific, but checking himself, suddenly asked: "Did the chap that brought her say anything about the kid? Did he say who she was, or how he came by her?"

"I heard that after," said the host. "Got the news from Yallala. He never said a word."

"That's queer," said the swagsman; "but I'll tell you all about it. It's like this. Bob Martin was the kid's father. Me and Bob was mates for years. We came out in the same vessel. There was a little gell aboard—Irish gell. Bob took a fancy to her; so did I. We tossed up who should have the first word with her; Bob won. He asked the gell; she took him. We was mates all the same."

The host nodded to signify entire attention, then sipped at the cold tea and whiskey, and went on smoking.

"Poor Bob was done for," the visitor continued, "by some thundering black fellow. You've heard of that. This chap," with a sideways nod, to indicate the object of his search, "drops in by chance, as a man might say, pretty nigh at the moment. He's got the human nature to take care of the kid; but mind this!"—he beat one hand heavily into the palm of the other—"he hasn't got the gumption, nor yet the common-sense, to ask if the kid has got a natural protector; and here you see him! The mother's dead. Poor Bob's gone to glory. Very well; I'm to the fore, ain't I? Who's the kid to belong to if it don't belong to me? That stands to reason, don't it? Me and Bob was mates at



home before Australia was much thought about. We was mates out here. The kid belongs to me, if it belongs to anybody! There's nobody in the world—mind that, matey—as has a better rights to her than I have."

He was quite resolute and angry by this time, and when he had finished he tossed off the remaining contents of his pannikin as if to say that he had spoken his last words upon the theme and defied argument.

"Well, yes," the settler answered; "that sounds reasonable." He turned his head sideways to the door and bellowed "Sarah" in a deep reverberating bass.

In answer to this call, a portly woman appeared with arms floured to the elbow. She nodded in friendly fashion to the stranger, and stood to listen.

"This day four weeks?" said the settler. "What was the party's name?"

"Hetheridge was the name he gave," the woman answered; "John Hetheridge."

"That was the name," said the settler; "Hetheridge; that was the name, to be sure; John Hetheridge. Melbourne he said he was going to, didn't he, Sarah?"

"Yes," the portly woman answered. "Melbourne was the place he named."

"Thank you kindly, missis," said the swagsman. He repeated underneath his breath: "John Hetheridge, Melbourne," twice or thrice, as if to fix it on his memory, and then rising to his feet, threw his swag over his shoulder and prepared to be gone. "Potter's my name," he said, by way of farewell; "Sam Potter. If I should be long away, you might drop across a mate or two of mine who'd like to know what's come of me. You might take the trouble to remember me and say I've gone down Melbourne way on a bit of a fossick after Bob Martin's kid. They'll understand that, any of 'em. Good-day, mate. Good-afternoon, missis; and once more, thank you kindly."

He had gone a hundred yards, perhaps, when he turned. The settler and his wife were shading their

eyes to watch him, and he roared back to ask how far it might be to the next station.

"A good twelve miles," was the answer, and with a final wave of the hand he turned again to resume his way, and in a while was lost to sight behind an intervening ridge.

When, a fortnight later, a trifle more sunburned and mahogany-colored than ever, Sam Potter carried his swag into Melbourne, nobody thought it worth while to turn to look at him. He and his kind in aspect were common enough in the Victorian capital at that time of day, though it is not improbable that his intrusion on "The Block" at, say, four o'clock on a fine afternoon of the present year might cause something of a flutter of surprise. Sam hailed up a portly citizen with a "Coo-ee" and a "Look here, matey!" and demanded at hazard to know the address of John Hetheridge.

"St. Kilda, somewhere," said the man addressed; "can't remember precisely. Ask about St. Kilda."

An outstretched arm indicated generally the route to be taken, and the swagsman tramped on through the town, and on again into the country, pausing for an occasional inquiry, then among scattered, handsomely-built houses, many of them approached by raw and half-made roads, and surrounded by the mere beginnings of gardens. The man paused and looked about him in perplexity, for the streets were lonely. By and by a nurse-girl came round a corner with a richly-attired child in her arms.

"Coo-ee!" cried Sam. The girl turning and halting at his call, he strode up to her. "I want to find a man named John Hetheridge as lives hereabouts," he said. As he spoke his eye fell upon the child's face, and he started in astonishment. "My word," he said under his breath, "this beats all! Why, little Bessie, this *is* a providence!"

"You're mistook, young man," said the nurse-girl withdrawing haughtily. "This ain't no Bessie."

"Mistook be blowed!" returned Sam Potter; "I know better. That's my kid—my old pal Bob Martin's daughter. Where's that Hetheridge live? You haven't got the kid without knowing that, I reckon."

"Your kid indeed!" returned the nurse, contemptuously, surveying the dusty, way-worn figure up and down; "that's a likely story."

"Show me John Hetheridge's house," said the wayfarer, "and bring little Bessie along indoors. I'll show you how likely the story is in two-two's, or," nodding his head with threatening sagacity, "maybe in a little less than that."

"That's the house at the corner," said the nurse-maid, and, inspired by a natural curiosity, she followed in his footsteps.

The nurse-maid was fresh from Cockneydom, and unused to the republican freedoms of Victoria; so that when the patched and dusty man walked to the front door, and sounded a peal on the knocker, she felt as though the foundation of her world were crumbling. A man-servant answered the summons, and demanded to know what was wanted.

"John Hetheridge lives here? I want to speak to him."

"What's your name?" the servant asked.

"Potter—Sam Potter. He won't know it; but he's welcome to it."

"What's your business?"

"I'll keep that for your boss, young man. Tell him I want to see him." The servant retiring into the hall, Sam followed and instinctively wiped his dusty boots upon the door-mat. He made a singularly elaborate business of the matter, and was still engaged upon it when the servant returned. A moment later he was ushered into an apartment of compound aspect, furnished half as an office and half as a lounging-room. Hetheridge was seated at a knee-table, and looked up, business-like, as the visitor entered. The servant closed the door, and the two were left alone.

"Well, my friend," inquired the master of the house; "what can I do for you?"

"Your name's Hetheridge?" said Potter. "John Hetheridge. Six weeks ago last Tuesday you was up country twenty mile beyond Yallala, or thereaway? It was you as found my mate, Bob Martin's body?" To each of these queries Hetheridge answered by a grave nod. "Very well, then. I'm Bob Martin's mate. The kid you took away from Bob Martin's shanty's mine. I claim my rights over her. I'm her natural protector."

"Well," said Hetheridge, dryly; "you'll have to prove your relationship."

He laughed a second later, Potter's face fell so ludicrously.

"Relationship? You mean kin?—blood kin?"

"Certainly," said Hetheridge. "Without that you've no more right to the child than I have."

"Now, look here, matey," said Sam Potter, balancing a weighty argumentative forefinger in front of him; "there's things as stands to reason and things as don't. I suppose you'll give in to that much, won't you?"

"Yes," said Hetheridge, watching him rather grimly. "I'll give in to that much. Go on."

"Well, then," pursued Potter, with a manner laboriously forensic, "if one cove has been another cove's mate in and out, come foul weather, come fair weather, come long commons, come short commons, for fifteen years and more; and if another cove hasn't as much as set eyes on the first cove; which is the man—I asks you solemn, and I asks you serious—which is the man that has a right to that cove's daughter?"

Hetheridge felt within doors as if he had a right to prick and anger his visitor before he finally disposed of him. His own edge had been sharpened on a rustic grindstone, but he thought it prodigiously finer than his interlocutor's.

"My good man," he answered, "I give it up."

To give force to the assumption of town-bred ease he wore, he broke a lucifer match in two and used a portion of it as a tooth-pick. His period of financial prosperity had not spoiled him, and he was still the same man who, sinking in a whirlpool of love and hatred and despair, could take pride in the handiwork of a West End tailor when its graces were hung out to public view on his own proper person.

"Have you," Potter asked him, with a yet more earnest voice, and a yet weightier balance of the forensic forefinger, "have you, along as compared with me, the right to Bob Martin's kid as I have? By all accounts, you never set eyes on him till he was dead and done with. I was his pal and pardner for years and years. What have you got to say to that?"

"Only this," Hetheridge answered, feeling that his indifferent toying with the blunt tooth-pick, his finer clothes and the negligent, gentlemanly attitude into which he had thrown himself in his office-chair, gave him a definite advantage over the other man's rough exterior and labored speech—"Only this, my good friend. Possession is nine points of the law; and if you'll ask the nearest solicitor, he'll tell you that the law has no more than ten points all told."

"Look here," said Potter, "you've got to prove your rights."

"No, my good friend," Hetheridge answered. "It's you who have to prove your rights. When you have done it, you may have the child, or you mayn't have her. In the mean time, she is my charge, and I see no reason why I should surrender her to you. What are you, to begin with?"

John Hetheridge had seen nothing for a year or two past, not even in the gains which swelled his banking account so rapidly, which had pleased him half so much. He had no especial affection for the child; but here was a man obviously in earnest, whose purpose he could balk or thwart, and that fact was meat and drink to him. That rooted hatred which he still felt toward

his old rival helped him to hate the world, just as a prosperous love disposes a man to be kindly and generous to all mankind. To be sure, the child, young as she was, and little as he had seen of her, was something of a solace. But whatever little touch of peace or hint of human feeling she had brought him was as nothing compared with the opportunity she offered here and now. She helped him here and now to spite a fellow-creature. Potter's very earnestness made her fifty times as dear. The man was spurred alike by love and duty, and in exact proportion with his intensity was the sweetness of denying him.

His last query had left Potter dumb, and seeing this he pursued his advantage. He threw himself into an attitude yet more negligent, and picked his teeth with an air of finer breeding than before.

"My good fellow," he flowed on, "it seems to me that any pretence that you may make about an anxiety for this child's welfare is absurd. Providence has reared up for her a friend in me. You see what the child's surroundings are. Can you offer her anything like them? You pretend to have been her father's friend, and I suppose you want me to believe that you have some sort of interest in the little thing herself; and yet you have the impertinence to come here and bully me because I saved her life, and because I offer her a home in which she can be bred up like a lady. I'll be hanged!" he cried, warming to his work under the lash of his own eloquence, "I'll be hanged if I ever heard such folly talked in all my life!"

"Mate," said Potter, brushing the back of his hand across his eyes, "you're right and I was wrong. I never thought to stand in the kid's light, and I won't. There's my hand on it."

"My good fellow," said Hetheridge, more fine gentlemanlike than ever, "I don't want your hand. Your business is over. You see the folly of your course, and you can go."

"Look here, matey," Potter answered; "Bob Mar-

tin was my mate and pardner for fifteen years and more."

"Yes, yes," Hetheridge interrupted, with a languid impatience. "We've heard all that already. Can you find your way out, or shall I ring?"

"I've got my duty," said Potter, "and I see it straight. I give her up because I see you can deal better by her than what I could. But I want to see her now and then, and I'd take it kindly if I was let to call on her now and again in my rough way. Not to do her harm, mind you. Not that for a moment, matey. But just to give her word of her father and mother, and to let her know as if anything happened to friends as was rich, there's always them as isn't to fall back upon."

"Can you find your way out," asked Hetheridge again, "or shall I ring?"

"Oh! don't you think," cried Potter, "as I'm to be drove out of my rights like this. Bob Martin was my pal and pardner."

Hetheridge arose and struck a gong which stood upon the mantelpiece. The man-servant appeared with an almost suspicious alacrity.

"Show this man out," said the master of the house.

"Ah, do!" said Potter, raising his swag from his shoulder, and dashing it upon the floor. "But suppose this man won't go out till he's got his rights. Eh?"

"I dare say," said Hetheridge, "that you'll be able to find a policeman within the next half-hour, Roberts, if you busy yourself. Will you see to that?"

"Don't trouble about me, matey," said Potter. "I've been in chokey once, just as innocent as I am now, and I know how blarsted 'ard it is to get out again; but I tell you this——"

"What do you tell me?" Hetheridge demanded.

"Well, on second thoughts," replied Sam Potter, "I'll go, and I won't tell you anything."

## CHAPTER V.

BOB MARTIN's self-appointed executor left the house at once, wrathful and perplexed. He made a mental note of it and its surroundings, to insure his knowing it again, and as he plodded toward the city examined the bearings right and left. He was not a man much given to diving into other people's motives, but Hetheridge puzzled him. The only surface motive for taking charge of a child under the circumstances was obviously benevolence. But Sam Potter, though by no means a physiognomist by profession, could not get away from the fact that Hetheridge looked as little likely to be benevolent as any man he could remember to have seen.

The wayfarer carried his bewilderments with him to a house of entertainment in Little Bourke Street, where morning, noon, and night the bar-room presented a constant scene of turmoil. Men jammed the doorways and crowded the room, fighting and wrangling and shouting together, the forward rows handing overhead glasses of liquor to the thirsty souls in the rear. What with the surging of the crowd, and the unsteadiness or carelessness of the hands to which the liquids in transit were intrusted, an intermittent rain of alcoholic liquors was sprinkled everywhere, so that after an hour spent in the middle of the apartment a man might count on being plenteously bedewed with every kind of restorative beverage, from colonial ale to champagne.

Penetrating into this resort by main force, Potter was hailed from half a dozen parts of the apartment by old companions, and by each and all of them was called upon to drink. He accepted and returned the



hospitalities thus proffered, and in the space of some two hours retired from the alcoholic combat in sheer impuissance, and fell asleep upon an empty beer-barrel in a corner. Waking partially refreshed, and meeting more old chums, he entered once more into the fray, found oblivion there, and awoke next morning to discover that he was in bed with his boots on, and that he suffered from a horrible nausea and headache. The contemplation of these two facts for awhile absorbed his whole intellectual powers; but by and by he began to piece the events of the evening together. He had a dreamlike feeling that he had sworn a compact of eternal brotherhood and friendship with somebody, but as to who that somebody might be he could form no idea. Awhile later, memory presented him with a blurred drawing of a man of foreign extraction, a man with an enormous mustache, a rime of beard and whisker, and a face like a wrinkled russet pippin in color. The blurred picture grew clearer, took roundity and form, and at last began to talk with vivid gesture and frantically expressive facial play in a language of which Sam Potter understood not one word.

When Sam had cleared things up to this point, he fell asleep again, all but the headache and the accompanying thirst, which would insist on keeping faithful watch and ward together over him. He was awakened by a considerable clatter, and, rolling drearily over, saw before him the identical foreign person of his memory, who, having slept in the same room, was now completing his toilet by putting on his boots and stamping in them to secure an easy fit.

"Oh, you're there are you?" said Sam, regarding his sworn brother of the night before with no exceptional enthusiasm of affection.

"Yes," said the foreigner, "I am here, and my head is here. I do not know how the poor little apartment contains a head so large. Your eyes, my friend," he interjected, suddenly, "are boiled!"

"They feel like it," Sam confessed.

"This is Australia!" said the little man chirpily. "Zat is vy. This is Breetish domeenion, my friend. In Breetish domeenion you must sometimes be drunk or be out of the fashion. And here they drink! Oh, how they drink—all day, all night, forever! And such liquids!"

"Where are we?" asked Sam, groaning. "How did we come here? I don't remember anything."

"It is still the wheel of fortune," his companion answered, "how we got here. We rolled here. Oh, you're a nice man to get to bed! Your boots! You would have your boots. Do you carry your money in your boots?"

"Never you mind where I carry my money," Sam answered with unwonted surliness. As a matter of fact, a half-score of five-pound bank-notes lay tucked away for safety between his stocking and the sole of his right boot, and he resented the inquiry as displaying too intimate a knowledge of his personal methods.

"Why should I mind?" said the Frenchman. He offered the question with a smiling vivacity, but suddenly clapped both hands to his head and groaned.

"I do not understand," he continued. "It is to me a puzzle, an enigma; my arms are not long, and yet with my hands I can embrace a sphere which is bigger than the world! Australia is a big place, my friend; but how, ah! how does it hold my head?"

"Hair of the dog," said Sam, struggling upright. "Have a drink."

"A drink!" shrieked the little Frenchman. "Never more in this accursed land!"

The noise and wrangle were in full swing below when the two descended, and the bar teemed with the surging crowd as if there had been no *interregnum* since the night before. The two sat down sadly to their morning meal, but made little progress with it, and just as they had ordered away the scarcely-tasted dish of steak and onion, the slovenly waiter brought

in a letter to the Frenchman, who, having merely opened it and glanced at its signature, looked up at his comrade with a meaning grimace.

"We talked last night," he said, "of Mr. Hetheridge. I told you I expected to hear from him; but I did not expect so soon."

"I don't remember," Sam answered.

"Not remember?" cried the little Frenchman. "Our whole talk was of him for an hour. Of him and of the little child. I told you of my own child, who is far away from here in my own country."

"I don't remember," Sam said again. "You talked a lot in your own lingo. I couldn't make head or tail of it."

"And I thought you so *sympathique*," said the Frenchman, laughing. "We shook hands when I had finished, and you said I was your brother. Well, there's no harm done, eh?"

Eliciting nothing but a grunt in answer, the vivacious little man took up his letter and read it intently.

"Yes," he said, when he had finished; "that will suit me very well. I will go and see our Mr. Hetheridge. You said last night that you had been to his house. Perhaps you will be so obliging as to show me the way."

"I'll go with you," said Sam. "A breath of fresh air will do me good."

The Frenchman thanked him, and they set out together. Sam, steering by yesterday's landmarks, piloted his companion to within a hundred yards of Hetheridge's house, and then sat down upon a bank of waste earth to smoke and muse until he should return. After the lapse of a quarter of an hour, the Frenchman reappeared, and with him came John Hetheridge. The little man fell a step or two to the rear and made signs in dumb show to his new-found comrade. Potter construed these rightly to indicate a desire that he should give no sign of recognition, and he smoked on stolidly until Hetheridge halted abreast of him on the other

side of the road and surveyed him with a look of scornful inquiry.

"You're here again, are you?" he began. "Now, mind you, if I catch you loafing about my place, I'll hand you over to the authorities at once. I'll have you properly dealt with. Get up, march!"

"Does this road belong to you, matey?" Potter replied.

"I won't have you hanging about my premises," Hetheridge responded with sudden heat of temper.

"Who's loafing about your premises?" retorted Potter. "I'm not nigh your premises. I'm going to sit here and smoke my pipe as long as I like and as often as I like."

"What do you want here?" Hetheridge asked him, his wrath rising at the other's coolness.

"Want?" said Potter; lazily expectorating. "Why, I want to admire the view. I've took a liking to this prospect."

The reply was obviously mendacious, for he sat in a hollow of the road, from which little or nothing but the back of Hetheridge's mansion was visible. A wilted and sickly gum-tree reared itself before him, and the roadway was half blocked with heaps of road metal, raw earth, and building refuse.

"Mr. Dom," said Hetheridge, turning upon the Frenchman, "will you oblige me by seeing if you can find a policeman while I stay here?"

"My dear, good sir," returned Monsieur Dom, lifting his shoulders to a level with his big white mustache, and turning the palms of both hands upward, "I am stranger here. I should lose myself in the first five minutes."

Hetheridge turned round on him angrily, but put a restraint upon himself.

"Wait here a minute," he said brusquely, and with that swung back toward the house.

"Do you think," asked Sam Potter, when Hetheridge had disappeared—"now I put it to you—do you think

as that's the sort of man to take a little child, a gell of a year old, and nuss it and breed it up for nothing but kindness' sake? Do you think that, matey, eh?"

"No," said Monsieur Dom, "I do not think it."

"I dessay," continued Potter, "he has got enough of a man's natural feelin's in him not to let a harmless little creetur die. That's why he took the kid, I dessay; but he's stickin' to her to spite another man as wants her. That's my opinion, anyhow."

"Very likely," returned Monsieur Dom; "very likely; but he can do so much better for the child than you can."

"Perhaps he can," Sam answered; "but will he? And, mind you, matey, there's more to a little soft up-growing thing like that than having plenty of swell togs and a big house to live in. A kid looks natural to being played with, and made much of. Does that look like the kind of cove to do it for her?"

Monsieur Dom, a little perplexed by his companion's idiom, shrugged his shoulders and threw up the palms of his hands again. Potter accepted this as a sign of emphatic assent.

"I knowed a cove once," he said, laying a heavy forefinger on the Frenchman's shoulder, "I knowed a cove once in camp. He'd got a kitten from somewheres, that cove had. I couldn't take a likin' to him, but I says to myself, there's somethin' about 'a chap as has a pleasure in an 'armless dumb animal, a toy animal like a kitten—don't you see, matey?"

Monsieur Dom, with a more emphatic shrug than ever, testified that he saw quite clearly.

"Well, now," pursued Potter, with his whole hand heavy on Monsieur Dom's shoulder by this time, and a slow flush of passion rising in his face, "what's that cove do? One day, when everybody but himself and one black chap was out of camp, he roasts that there poor innocent 'armless little thing alive!"

"What for?" gasped Monsieur Dom, retiring in obvious horror at the story.

"Why," said Potter, "to enj'y its sufferin'! There's men like that, matey."

"I hope not," the Frenchman answered. "I wish, my friend, not to hear of these unpleasant things. I shall be unhappy for a day. Why do you contaminate my ears with this abomination?"

"I'll tell you," said Potter, "when I set eyes on that chap's face last night for the first time, I'd a sworn to Heaven I'd seen him afore. I wondered where I'd come across that ugly mug of his'n. I know now. He's the livin' image of the man as did that act. He's the very spit of him."

"It is not a good face," said the Frenchman. "It is a cruel face; but we do not to-day believe in Blue Beard, my good friend. Blue Beard is dead, and all the wicked giants that took little children for their suppers have been killed."

Hetheridge reappeared, walking with an angry and determined step.

"Look here, you!" he said, as he drew near. "I've made arrangements to have a policeman on permanent duty here. If you are found loafing about this neighborhood I'll have you in the clink before you can say knife."

"This is the Queen's highway, this is," returned Mr. Potter, tranquilly. "I know the law as well as you do. In your own house it's different. On the Queen's highway one man's as good as another. I've got as much rights to be here as the Governor of Victoria himself, and I'm going to stay here just as long as it suits me."

"Do it!" said Hetheridge, with a tremulous passion in his voice; "and do it at your peril!" His face was dark with rage, and the warning hand he held before it shook as his voice did.

"Who roasted that there kitten?" Potter asked, and the enraged step he took in Hetheridge's direction, combined with the surprise of this most unexpected query, caused his enemy so suddenly to recoil that he

tripped upon a bank of rubbish and sat down as if the accusation had been accompanied by a blow. "It was you," continued Potter, "or else it was your very own born brother. I don't believe there was ever two such mugs in the whole world before."

Hetheridge rose staring, and brushed the dust from his coat-tails with both hands.

"The man's mad," he said, appealing to Monseieur Dom. "Stark, staring, raving mad. You understand, you fellow?" shaking a passionate forefinger at Potter. "You show yourself here again at your peril."

Monsieur Dom waited until Hetheridge had turned his back, and then, with a new shrug of the shoulders, and a grimace so complicated as to offer no clew to its own meaning, he followed, leaving Mr. Potter in momentary possession of the field.

Mr. Potter strolled around the house and examined it at leisure, with no result in the slightest degree satisfactory to himself. Whether Hetheridge's threat had been entirely empty, or whether the authorities had refused or neglected to accede to his demands, matters little; but Sam's wanderings that morning, and daily thereafter for many weeks, were undisturbed. He drew upon the bank somewhat extensively for raiment, and wandering in a gayly striped shirt, bird's-eye neckerchief, brand-new wide-awake and fancy cummerbund, cut so dashing and sprightly a figure that in the course of time he even enlisted the fancy of the haughty nurse-maid. In the course of many roving years, Mr. Potter had had but limited opportunities for the study of humanity's fairer half; but he developed a decided bent in that direction in these days of leisure, and before a month was over the haughty nurse-maid was at his feet. Sam carried the child over hundreds of miles all told, and the maid, relieved of the burden of her charge, strolled along beside him, content to admire his manly ways and proportions, and perforce content to see lavished upon the infant the major part of Sam's caresses and endearments. If

Hetheridge knew in what way his wishes were defied he gave no sign, and Mr. Potter, who was, like most men of his class, very easy-going in his notions of the future, looked upon the existing condition of things as likely to be permanent.

This fancy received a rude shock one morning about the end of April, when his Matilda suddenly appeared in tears, and without the baby, at their usual trysting-place.

Brief inquiries drew forth the story. It was complicated with sobs and tears, and broken in upon by many narrative alarms and excursions; but its gist was simply this. The child was away to England by the mail-boat which sailed that afternoon. She was in charge of an English clergyman and his wife, who, after some years' experience of the colony, were returning home. Matilda had listened—she confessed it—at the keyhole, and was familiar with the details of the arrangement. The clergyman was to receive a sum of one hundred pounds a year for the child's maintenance and education until it should please Hetheridge to reclaim her. The name under which she had been surrendered was that of Ellice Hetheridge. The first year's payment in advance had been made this morning, and the party had already started for the vessel. Matilda gathered from what she had overheard that the arrangement now finally concluded had been pending and in discussion for a month.

"But, I say, look here, 'Tilda," said the astonished Sam, "this won't wash at all! I'm not goin' to have Bob Martin's little gell smuggled away like this!"

It seemed to him outrageous—a sin against reason to believe in its bare possibility.

"The child's yours, if she's anybody's, Sam," Matilda sobbed; "and, oh! to think we've had her miles and miles away together such a many times, and might have run away with her almost at any minute. I do believe that there Hetheridge has known about it all along, and has just been a-laughing at us."



That, on reflection, seemed to be not improbable; but it afforded no present aid or solace. Sam inquired particularly the name of the vessel, but could learn only that it was the English mail. That, however, was ample for his guidance, and having comforted the weeping Matilda with a kiss or two, and made a new rendezvous with her, he set off full-tilt upon his enterprise. He had no difficulty in making out the vessel he was in search of. She was moored in mid-stream, with a swarm of boats about her conveying passengers or bringing friends who had said their last "good-bys" on shore again. Sam hailed a boat and was soon aboard the mail-ship. There, almost the first man who met his inquiring gaze was Hetheridge, who stood on deck engaged in converse with a tall, meek man in clerical attire. Sam, without a moment's pause, made for the pair.

"Look here, matey," he began, with a sudden, vigorous hand on Hetheridge's shoulder; "you're a tryin' to do what you've got no rights to do."

Hetheridge lookēd him up and down with a cool and wicked smile.

"I thought I might see you here," he said; "and now, my man, I have to warn you. If you make a moment's disturbance here I shall give you in charge. Officer, this way a moment."

A policeman, hitherto unseen, stepped forward.

"This is the man I told you of," said Hetheridge. "If he offers me any annoyance you know your duty."

"Look here, mate," Sam began, addressing the policeman, "that chap has stole——"

"You mustn't make a disturbance here," broke in the official, with true official phlegm.

"I tell you," cried Sam, half-beside himself with grief and pain, "he's got no more rights to what he's doing than you have."

"Come, come," said the policeman, "less noise."

Here came what Hetheridge had hoped for, and, indeed, had counted on. Mr. Potter fell back upon the

vernacular of the camp, and used it noisily. He characterized Hetheridge and his conduct in such language that the parson lifted hands of pious horror and withdrew from the scene. He roared so lustily that a crowd was round about him in an instant. Hetheridge took good care to be outside it, and almost in as little time as it takes to tell, the hapless Sam was handcuffed and lumped roughly over the vessel's side. He spent what remained of the day and the night which followed it in a police cell, and on the ensuing morning paid a fine of twenty shillings, with costs seventeen and sixpence, on a charge of insulting behavior.

The mail-ship had sailed at her appointed hour, and Bob Martin's little girl by this time was far upon the sea.

## CHAPTER VI.

HETHERIDGE was once more up country; this time with a travelling companion in the person of Monsieur Dom. Monsieur Dom was a *vigneron*, and had been exported from his native place by an Australian wine-grower some two or three years earlier. His first engagement, from one cause or another, resulting in failure, the expert found his services somewhat at a discount, and was getting into the lowest financial waters when chance threw him in the way of his new patron.

There was scarcely any possible form of business into which at this time Hetheridge was not ready to venture. He had already more money than he had ever hoped to own—more than he could now hope to spend, or to make any reasonable use of except for the mere sterile purpose of increase. But a new purpose was like a new toy. It interested and amused him for a time. For a week or two, at least, he could throw himself heart and soul into a novel enterprise, and at such times he would enjoy a blessed surcease of his mental miseries. So soon, however, as the accustomed business began to pall, his old hopeless hatred of George Redwood, and his old hopeless love of George Redwood's wife, would come storming back upon him. Neither the love nor the hate seemed to have grown feebler with the intervening years. And there were days and nights when the man's thoughts were a veritable hell to him. He struck a thousand blows in fancy at his distant enemy. He decoyed him into countless ambushes. He ruined him in countless ways, coined for him countless misfortunes, heaped in his cruel fancy sickness, disease, and death upon him, in every fashion his imagination could devise.

Everything he had touched since the first beginning of his business life in Australia had turned so magically to gold that he had begun to have the gambler's veneration for his own luck, and to believe it indestructible. His rashest ventures justified his faith, and enterprises in which no sane business man would have joined him turned out in some cases even more successfully than others in which every speculator aware of their existence would have had a finger. He was less rash by far than he seemed to be to the outside observer; but he played boldly and with confidence; and if at any time a solitary scheme should have failed, there were always a score of others, to any one of which he would have trusted to recoup himself.

He had heard of the failure of Monsieur Dom, and had come to the conclusion that the *vigneron* was in no way to blame for it. He had gone into local figures and general statistics with respect to the production and consumption of wine, and had arrived at the belief that in the growth of the vine lay one of the largest and most profitable industries of the future Australia. He had satisfied himself that the land on which Monsieur Dom's failure had been arrived at had been in all respects suited to its purpose, and that the scheme had been wrecked simply and only by the crude haste of its promoters.

A poverty-stricken semblance of an industry was being carried on, and a wine of inferior and uncertain quality reached the public from the vineyard every year. The expert was enthusiastic in his certainty as to the possibilities of improvement both in yield and quality, and he beguiled the way by an exposition of his own hopes and schemes. Hetheridge, after his own fashion, was eagerly interested. To throw himself, head and shoulders, brain and body, heart and soul, into this new business, was his only momentary refuge from the sting of his own passions.

He made his investigation on the spot, bought the vineyard at the end of a week's inquiries, installed

the little Frenchman as his general manager, and, on fire with ambition for a new fortune and a new career, started off on a fifty-mile journey across country to inspect a second vineyard which had fallen into pretty much the same state of business decrepitude as the first.

"I shall be there long before nightfall," he told Dom, as he prepared to start in the cool gray of morning. "I know enough about the business now to look into it myself to begin with, and you can come over a week later, and we'll go into the matter together. Ride over this day week. The men here say that the track can't be lost, and that on the whole it's pretty good riding."

Dom promised to obey instructions, and Hetheridge, with no further *adieux* climbed into the saddle and rode away. For a mile or so the track led him across an undulating plain, sparsely covered with a growth of low gray scrub, but the character of the vegetation changed rapidly as he travelled. The scrub grew to brushwood, and the brushwood to forest, and in an hour he was deep in the bush. The track, though apparently used but rarely, was clearly marked enough, and he rode on with no care about the way, his mind boiling with business schemes. By and by he fell into a kind of vacuity; the mood in which any trifle becomes of interest. He was dressed, of course, in bushman's fashion, and wore neither coat nor waistcoat over his shirt of gray flannel. His watch was stowed away in his breeches pocket, secured by the bar of the chain being thrust through a small hole cut for the purpose at the waistband. He noticed that one of the links of the chain was open, and on examining it more closely, discovered that the slender gold wire of which it was composed had been bent until it had cracked more than half-way through. He unfastened the bar as he rode, and examined the injured links with a close and purposeless scrutiny, such as men in mere emptiness of mind often expend upon the most worthless trifles.

"I must get this mended," he said to himself, as he returned the watch to his pocket and fixed the bar of the chain in its former place; "and I must mend my rate of going, too."

A touch of the spur awoke the horse, who, like his master, had been dreaming, and the quicker motion roused the rider's blood and set his thoughts working once again. They turned inevitably toward the old Worcestershire village, and centred in George Redwood. To have George Redwood here now, lured in confidence of perfect friendship into the vast tangle of the bush! To beguile him from the track and leave him there to wander in thirst and hunger until privation and despair bred madness and madness led to death! There was a thought to gloat upon! All the great passions feed the imaginative faculties, and a great hate or a great love will make a Shakespeare of the dullest fool. Under the stimulus of the passions, the mental sight is clarified and strengthened. A thought becomes an object, and is seen as if with the physical eye. Redwood moved through a series of living pictures in Hetheridge's mind. They rode side by side together along the broader portion of the track, and one could have laid a hand upon the other. Dress, aspect, facial expression, were true in every detail as if in a vivid dream. A mole on the hated rival's forehead was noticeable. One short yellow hair sprang from the middle of it. His white teeth gleamed in a smile and his eyes glistened.

There was one respect, if one only, in which the imaginative conception of the joy of vengeance was richer and fuller than reality could be. Hetheridge slew his enemy again and again and again, and had him still to slay. A score of times in the course of that lonely ride he beguiled Redwood from the track, lost him in interminable forest solitudes, watched him through the lingering agonies of thirst and hunger, and cursed him triumphantly in his dying hour. And the beauty of it all was that there was no satiety pos-

sible. There was no relenting in the theme, no slowing down in the pulse of his hate's fever.

He rode on until high noon, the bush growing denser and more dense as he travelled. He was brought suddenly to a halt by a prodigious noise of rending and tearing not far in front, and whilst he checked his horse in wonderment and terror at the unexpected sound, it grew in volume and intensity, until with a terrific crash a giant tree fell across the track, snapping other trees of six or eight feet in girth as if they had been withes. When he had partially recovered from the shock the uproar had given to his nerves, he rode up to the fallen monarch and regarded it with amazement. The vast trunk lay prone upon the ground, but standing in his stirrups he found his head a yard below its upper rim. Possibly when the Bastard led the Norman hosts to England this ancient of the bush, so newly fallen from its place of pride, had already flourished fair and broad. Through long centuries it had reached its prime, and through long centuries had rotted at the root, until at last, on a day of calm and windless splendor, it had fallen, with the shriek and groan of the neighboring forest for its requiem.

There was no climbing over the recumbent body of the dead monarch, even if the traveller had been on foot, and there was obviously nothing for it but to make a *détour*. Nothing doubting that the tree would guide him back to the track, Hetheridge plunged into the virgin bush. The mere undergrowth there made a roof thirty feet in height, and before he had gone twenty yards he found himself involved in a subdued twilight. A sudden terror of the silence, the loneliness, the dimness of the place, got hold of him, and but for the dread of ridicule, he would have ridden back again. Common-sense came to his aid a moment later, and he asked himself derisively what he had to fear. The huge trunk offered him so plain a guidance that a blind man need hardly have lost it. But there

were tangled creepers everywhere at his feet, and huge lianas reached from tree to tree like the distorted cordage of some-Brobdiagnadian vessel, and in a very little while he found himself compelled to alight and to lead his horse. Many divergences from the straight line were forced upon him, and once or twice an icy spasm of fear passed through him at the thought that he had lost the guiding line of the fallen trunk. He came back to it each time with a muffled heart, his body bathed in perspiration from head to foot. The difficulties of the passage through the dense undergrowth, and the alternate shocks of fear and safety, seemed so to exaggerate the distance he had traversed that, though he recognized the monstrosity of the fancy, he would have been half-prepared to swear that the tree was a mile in length.

For a fourth or fifth time the guiding line of the tree was lost, and as he struggled fiercely back to it his foot tripped and he fell among tangled roots and creepers. He was on his feet again in an instant, but had no conception of the direction in which he had been moving. In the thick twilight every brief vista looked like every other, and his heart knocked at his ribs with a half-superstitious terror of the place. He recovered his horse's rein mechanically, and sat down resolute to master his fears. Surely they were futile and absurd. Despite his fancies, he knew that he could not yet have strayed a hundred feet from the track. That he should be unable to repair so very slight a misadventure was palpably ridiculous. Once again, what was there to be afraid of? The very posture of the patient horse without doubt indicated the direction he had pursued at the moment of his fall. He had but to follow that for half a score of yards at the outside to find his guide again. He mopped his streaming face with the sleeve of his flannel shirt, and argued himself back into self-possession, though the gloom and silence were menacing beyond the power of words to say. Rising to his feet, he pushed on again with



the rein thrown loosely over his left arm. The passage seemed a little easier, and he was suddenly hopeful. He made ten, twenty, thirty yards; but no giant fallen tree trunk came in sight. Whilst he was yet bruised by his fall, the horse must have moved, and so have led him to take a false direction. In a sudden frenzy of wrath, he kicked the hapless beast and punched it savagely about the head with both hands, cutting his fingers against the snaffle and one of the buckles of the head-stall. Then, still dragging the frightened and now reluctant beast, he strove to retrace his steps. In and out, up and down in a growing agony and horror, he struggled for an hour, and at last, with his shirt torn to tatters and his body bruised in every limb, he sat down upon a gnarled tree root to the appalling consciousness that he was lost. On this conclusion he fell into a horrid stupor, in which every faculty of mind and body seemed benumbed. And when his terrors pricked him anew so deeply as to overmaster this offspring of their own, he shouted, on the vague off-chance of some traveller being within ear-shot of him, until his voice failed him altogether. The overshadowing forest strangled and stifled his cries, shriek as loudly as he would. His voice seemed to his own ears scarcely to penetrate the surrounding bush at all, and yet a hundred times before his voice gave way his straining ears seemed to catch a far-off answer to his call.

He had with him, strapped to the swag at the back of his saddle, a great flannel-clothed tin bottle of water, and a tin case containing bread and meat. Packed in the swag itself was a travelling flask of brandy, holding perhaps half a pint. In the midst of his despair, he resolved to hoard these slight provisions. He mixed a little brandy-and-water now, and made a sparing meal, astonished to find that his mental anguish left him the power to eat at all. By the time he had finished his sparse luncheon and packed his provisions up again, his wits began to work a lit-

tle, and he suddenly bethought him of the toy compass he carried on his watch-chain. That would at least guide him in one direction, and if he could be sure of keeping a straight line he might—by carefully husbanding his strength and resources—fight his way out of this infernal solitude and get back to life again. The thought was like a very ray of sunlight to his soul, and his hand went mechanically to the pocket in which he kept his watch, but the watch was gone, and with it the compass which had depended from its chain! Nothing was left but the bar and three or four inches of the chain, ending at the broken link he had noticed almost at the beginning of his journey. He laughed immoderately at this terrible discovery, and when the dry and mirthless spasm was over, dropped his head into both hands, and wept with sobs which shook him as if with an internal earthquake.

When he looked up again, the gloom seemed deeper than it had been, and he felt an access of horror at the thought of night. Whatever might befall him, he would die fighting—he would struggle to the last. He deserted the horse as an incumbrance, and securing his provisions by a strap, set off upon his wild and dubious way again. In these close and breathless shades the heat was terrible, and he sat down many times feeling he could go no further, but only after a pause to stagger to his feet and struggle on again.

Shade by shade the gloom deepened, and whilst it was yet broad day upon the open plains the darkness of night itself shrouded the forest. The lost wretch cowered amongst the fern, weeping and praying and cursing in a breath, until at last sleep pressed down upon him with a weight not to be resisted. He lay immovable for hours, and then half his mind awoke to pleasing dreams, and from these he struggled to a knowledge of his true position.

To his feet again, resolved to find a way at once or die at once, and in any case to put an end to these lingering torments. On and on, now up, now down, in

and out, climbing, falling, fainting, breathless, scratched and bruised from head to heel, with every sobbing breath a cry for the everlasting silence or a prayer for delivery from his estate. Hours of despair in which he sat motionless as a stone—hours of effort in which he toiled like a madman. Then the night again, with its dead sleep and breakage into happy dreams and hideous awaking.

On the third day—on a sudden—light! and a thinning of the forest, and a wild breaking into a space comparatively open! If his throat, parched as it was by thirst and torn by shouting, could have given forth the sound, he would have called aloud for joy to see the blessed sun again. Everywhere about him were signs of the late presence of man. On every hand the trees were ring-barked, and the undergrowth had been burned away. The gray skeleton monsters ranged before him in uncounted thousands, and, desolate as the prospect was, he hailed it in his heart as if he had been lifted straight from hell to Heaven. His joy was but short lived, for the mid-day sun struck down on him with a heat which seemed intolerable to his weakened frame, and before an hour was over he was fain to rest in the shadow cast by one scarred and ruined trunk, and there realized the fact that he was as lost, and as far away from the chance of rescue, as before! Everywhere the gray skeletons writhed before him in an infinite monotony of variety. To his fevered fancy, the leafless arms mopped and mowed in a thousand grotesque attitudes of deference and beseeching—menace and defiance. Here a fire-scarred monster lifted two great writhing arms of bony white, as if the torment of its burning had left it fixed in that posture of agonized death; and there another drooped its skeleton limbs in the sheer horror of despair; and a third seemed fixed in some wild attitude of the dance, and every one about him as far as his bloodshot eyes could see took some human semblance.

But if the scene were dreadful in mid-day to a mind

and eye distempered by great suffering, what was it in the night-time, when the broad Australian moon looked down on that great desert of dead timber, and every knot, and wart, and elbow took some fiendish, animal or human, shape? Then every desolate trunk mocked at his miseries with a score of impassive faces: loftily serene, sedately scornful, grotesque with devilries and animalisms unspeakable; gap-mouthed, with eyes hidden in wrinkled laughs, hoggish, doggish, fiendish; a moonlit hell peopled with such tribes of scorn, indifference and mockery as never eyes beheld, or horror-ridden fancy dreamed of till that hour!

The spirit which could have endured the mockery of this desolation was never clothed in clay. In the course of that long night the man's reason toppled from its place, and the rising sun looked down upon a raving madman, who struck attitudes to imitate the twisted tortures of the tree trunks, and grinned and gibbered at the faces which derided him from all their knots and wrinkles. And yet through everything the love of life remained, and he staggered on not knowing whither his footsteps led him. At length the final phase of the lost bushman's madness fell upon him. Wild with thirst, and frantic with long fears, he began to travel round and round, and to disrobe himself as he went. He tore off his tattered shirt and cast it to the ground, and pausing a hundred yards later threw away his undervest. Five minutes later a boot was thrown away, and a little later yet its fellow followed it. So, piece by piece, he parted with his raiment, stumbling round in his devil's circle all the while; and at last, stark naked, lay down to wait for death.

## CHAPTER VII.

THERE was a noise of wind in the trees, and a sound of running water near at hand. He seemed to have heard both for hundreds of years, and to have waited in an agonized impatience until some invisible bar between his aching forehead and the cool air, and his thirsting lips and the water, should be removed. A voice had been talking monotonously all the while—for hundreds and hundreds of years. It was maddening to think that any human creature should have been near him through all that dreadful lapse of time and should have done nothing to relieve his pain. There was a weight upon his limbs, a clog upon his tongue, and he could neither move nor speak. He was muffled in thick darkness, but he knew that a light was somewhere near, though, like the fresh air and water, it was barred for him. The voice went on in a monotonous hollow murmur level and remorseless. His own miseries, and the callous indifference of the talking fiend, so pricked him that he broke through his own heavy lethargy and groaned aloud. The voice stopped suddenly and after a pause somebody said—

“The bloke’s thirsty again. Where’s his tippie?”

He heard a faint splashing noise, as if a vessel had been dipped in water, and a while later, he felt his head raised by a strong arm, and the cool wet rim of a pannikin touched his burning lips. He drank greedily. The arm gently withdrew itself, and allowed his head to fall back into his former attitude. He savored the after-taste of the draught doubtfully. Why should any one bring him cold tea in the middle of this inhospitable desert? His eyelids weighed like lead, but he contrived to raise them for an instant. A gush of

light dazzled him, and his eyes involuntarily closed again. Everything went preternaturally quiet, and he either slept at once or swooned into unconsciousness. When he recovered himself, after what seemed an enormous interval of time, the noise of the wind in the trees, and the bubble of the running waters, and sound of the level monotonous voice, were all twined together as before. He felt a faint curiosity as to his whereabouts and his surroundings, but was too tired and careless to gratify it by a look. He felt no bonds, but was sure that he was bound, for he could not move so much as a finger, though he made an idle experiment in that direction. Something within himself said very lazily and feebly that it didn't matter. The woven noises of the water, and the trees, and the voice had grown to be pleasant and restful, and in a while they made a sort of lullaby for him. They slipped away and returned again, and when this had happened twice or thrice, they left him altogether, and he fell into a deep and dreamless slumber.

It was daylight when he awoke again, and the first thing of which he was conscious was an odor of frying, which was peculiarly grateful to his nostrils. Something fizzled briskly in a pan close at hand, and the sound and the scent together were so appetizing that he tried to lift up his head and look about him. He abandoned the effort with a groan, but his eyelids seemed less heavy than they had been the night before, and he took cognizance of the place he lay in. The light streamed in through the open doorway, and showed him the interior walls of a hut, roughly built of the trunks of saplings, and roofed with sheets of corrugated zinc. The earthen floor was bare, save where he lay in a corner on a pile of ammunition blankets. A clumsily-constructed table stood in the centre of the room, and a pair of kerosene cases were ranged by it to serve as chairs.

He had not strength for much speculation or curiosity, but he felt a faint wonderment as to how he

came there. Whilst he looked about him and puzzled his tired brain indifferently, a bearded man in ragged moleskin trousers and a gray shirt came in at the door, bearing the hissing pan in one hand and in the other a steaming billy of tea. The incomer's glance met Hetheridge's eyes, and with an air of pleased alacrity he set the billy and the pan hastily upon the table, and in another second knelt beside him.

"Comin' round, eh, matey?" he asked, cheerfully. "That's right. I thought we'd pull you through. Bill," he called, rising and moving softly toward the door, "here's this chap sensible again. Come and have a look at him."

Another bearded man, in tattered moleskins and a flannel shirt, entered the hut in obedience to this summons, holding a pair of floury hands before him, from which he peeled off small pills of dough whilst he regarded the patient with a thoughtful aspect.

"Now, don't you try to talk," said the first comer, "if you don't feel up to it. You're better, you know, ain't you?"

Hetheridge drooped his languid eyelids in assent to this, but made no other answer. What his own looks were like he could not guess, but the spectacle he presented to his rescuers was nothing less than ghastly. The three-weeks' stubble of his beard, with its indeterminate color of half-baked bread, gave a bluish tint to the excessive pallor of his complexion. He had been dreadfully sun-blistered, and his nose and forehead were still furred with leprous-looking scales of parting skin. He looked altogether fleshless, and the bones of his nose, brows, and temples were tightly overdrawn, and took a bluish polish with the strain. The face looked all eyes and beak—the eyes supernaturally large and glittering, and deep-sunken.

"I think he'll do, Bill," said the first speaker; "what do you think?"

The man addressed thoughtfully peeled off a little

spiral of dough and chewed it, regarding the patient meanwhile.

"He could hardly be much worse," he said, after an interval; "let's hope he'll mend. I'll hot up a drop of that mutton soup for him."

So saying he left the hut, and in a little while returning with a pannikin of warm broth, he fed the patient with an iron spoon, nursing the feeble head on his own shoulder very gently. The other man watched this process with absorbed interest, seated on one of the kerosene cases with his bare elbows on the table and his bearded chin in his hands.

"That's right, matey," he said, encouragingly, as Hetheridge's lips shaped to receive the last spoonful. "You begin to peck a bit, and in a day or two we'll have you on your pins again. He's lookin' better already, ain't he, Bill?"

"I've got hope for him," Bill answered. "If he'll take kindly to his tucker, he'll be all right. Have a drop more, matey?"

The tired eyes signified a "No." The nurse lowered the patient softly, and smoothed the roll of blankets which did duty as his pillow. He went outside the hut a second time, and returned with a tin of fair water. Dipping in this one end of a tattered old jack towel of coarsé herden, he laved Hetheridge's hands and face, and dried them with a series of soft pats.

"And now," he said, with a little tap on the shoulder by way of farewell and encouragement, "you'll do very nicely. Look after the damper, Joe; it's ready by this time, surely."

His companion went out in obedience to this request, and shortly returned with a big, ungainly muffin on the end of a pointed stick. He dusted the wood ashes from it, employing his soft felt hat for that purpose, and dumped it on the table. In the mean time the man who answered to the name of Bill had laid out pannikins, tin plates, a jar of sugar, and even the daz-



zling luxury of knives and forks. The preparations being completed, the two men sat down and ate like a pair of healthy giants, Hetheridge watching from his sunken eyes and idly envying their vitality.

His whole day was a chronicle of soup and sleep. The men who had found and saved him had kept watch and watch over him from the first, and to-day the man who had made the damper was his nurse. He was always at hand when the patient awoke, always watchful, assiduous, and gentle. He smoked his pipe in the doorway for the most part, sitting on one of the kerosene cases, and reading in a dog's-eared misshapen old volume which had long since lost its binding, and with much thumbing and ill-usage had fallen in places into a very decrepitude of illegibility. The habit was probably bred of solitude, but as he read he murmured half aloud, and Hetheridge recognized the voice he had heard on his first waking from delirium to consciousness. The sunshine lay hot and bright outside; the falling waters of a creek close by made a changeful music, and the reader's deep-chested murmur had an influence as soporific as either of them.

The rescued man thought of nothing in his waking moments, nor cared to think of anything. There was an unheard-of gulf of agony far away behind him. He had passed through it and beyond it somehow, and he lay resting as tranquil and with a mind as idle as a week-old child's. He had no care to know where or when he had been found, how long he had lain here, or what had happened in the outer world since his unlooked-for leaving.

The second man returned to the hut at sundown. Another meal, differing in no particular from the first, was ready for him on arrival. The two sat over it with the same grand appetite displayed at early morning, and conversed in murmurs in consideration of their patient. Hetheridge lay careless between asleep and awake. He heard the words they used, but had no earthly interest in them.

- "I say, Bill, old chap," said one, "I've had a stroke of luck to-day."

"Good iron!" said the other, genially.

"So have you," said the first speaker.

"What is it?" Bill asked, "Grog?"

"No," the other answered, "it's better than grog. A Melbourne paper, only eight days old."

"Where is it?" Bill asked, eagerly. "How did you come by it?"

"I was right on top of Mount Dismal when I saw a chap on horseback a mile away. I gave him a 'coo-ee,' and rode down like the very devil. He waited, and it turned out to be old gamey Carter. He'd got half a dozen papers with him just to drop around among any of the boys he lighted on, and I begged the latest. Here it is!"

He drew it from between his bare breast and his flannel shirt and waved it on high with an almost boyish glee. His comrade turned up the lamp and settled himself with a grave expectancy of enjoyment.

"This is a bit of luck!" he said. "Tom Jones is a fine book, mind you, but when you haven't had another thing to read for ten months at a stretch it gets monotonous. We'll take it turn and turn about," he added. "Shake your chin, old child, and I'll light up."

The man with the newspaper began to read. To the intense delight of both, the paper held the news brought by the monthly mail from England. There were rumors of wars, there was a split in the Cabinet, a horrible murder at dead of night in one of the great London squares, a daring burglary, and a great divorce case—a glut of treasure!

Hetheridge, between sleeping and waking, heard it all with a profound want of interest. Nothing mattered to him—he felt as if nothing ever could matter to him any more.

"I say," said the reader suddenly, in an excited whisper, "what's this?"

The reader turned his face in the direction of the

half-unconscious listener, and tapped the paper with a significant finger at the same time.

"Listen to this:—'It is now three weeks since Mr. John Hetheridge, of St. Kilda, disappeared in the bush between Gallalong and Wilson's Creek. Several search parties have been organized, and the horse of the unfortunate gentleman was discovered on Tuesday, not more than fifty yards from the track. The body of the animal was in an advanced stage of decomposition, but a number of papers were found in the swag attached to the saddle. Amongst them were documents relating to the purchase of the Gallalong Vineyard, effected by the missing man, only a week before his tragic disappearance. Mr. Hetheridge, though somewhat reserved in manner, was highly respected for his business probity and acumen. In the course of a very brief period of Colonial life he had amassed a considerable fortune, and he was engaged in many enterprises which would have proved of distinct advantage to the Colony. His unexpected removal from our midst will be regarded with general regret, but it is not impossible to hope for further tidings.'"

From the first mention of his own name, Hetheridge had grown suddenly wide awake and keenly apprehensive in every fibre of his mind. In that state of physical exhaustion in which he lay, the mind, as hundreds of recorded instances will prove, has a strange knack of playing tricks upon itself. He saw distinctly—he was absolutely certain—that in the state of things the paragraph disclosed, there lay for him an easy and safe advantage. What that advantage was, and where it lay, he did not guess, or even attempt to guess; yet a secret satisfaction ran through all his blood, and a dawn of vaguest yet most comforting hope arose within his mind. It was as if within himself he had harbored a dual personality, and as if the one had whispered to the other: "Here is a safe haven in front of us. I will show you the chart to-morrow."

His rescuers turned together when the reading of

the paragraph was finished, and looked upon their charge. His head was averted from the light and from them, and they were satisfied that he was sound asleep.

"I say, Bill," said the reader, in a whisper; "that ought to be worth something to a pair of poor devils like us. He might spring a hundred apiece, you'd fancy."

"Well," said the other, pulling contemplatively at his pipe, and speaking in the same guarded tone, "I think I'd do something better than that for the man who had the good luck to save my life, if I happened to be a Melbourne millionaire."

Hetheridge listened, watching through half-closed eyes the steady gleam of the lamplight on the wall. He did not know as yet of any purpose to be served by the denial of his own identity, and yet he felt an assurance that he should make it, and that he would have an excellent reason for it.

He fell asleep soon after this, and slumbered soundly throughout the night. He was awake at early dawn, and the first thought that occurred to him was that in a little while some purpose would be made clear. He waited for it, with a patience made all the easier for him by the fact of his own physical weakness and his general want of interest. A day or two went by, and he was so much stronger that he had begun to take a little solid food, before either of his comrades ventured to question him. His voice was back, and he could talk a little, though the faintest exertion still fatigued him easily.

"Where did you find me?" he asked of the man who answered to the name of Bill. "Was it far away from here?"

"A matter of ten miles," the man responded. "Away up west, right on the limits of the run. It was my mate sighted you, lying stark naked. It was touch and go! old man."

Hetheridge gave a feeble sigh of assent.

"Touch and go!" he murmured, with but a little

appreciation of the meaning of the words he used. "Touch and go!"

"You might have lain there," the man pursued, "fifty years, and never a living soul have set an eye on you. You are away on the back blocks here, mate. This is the last place God made, and He forgot to finish it."

Hetheridge lay silent, and seemed to doze. The dawn of a purpose was broadening and clearing in his mind. He had a premonition that by and by it would appear. Everybody knows the state in which a question yet unspoken is anticipated, in which a tone yet unborn rings in the ear like a memory of bygone ages. Hetheridge experienced it now, and waited in tremulous expectancy. It came in the very words, in the very tone, for which his inmost soul had waited.

"Your name is Hetheridge, isn't it?"

It was as if the purpose nurtured by the one half of himself had torn from it the seal of secrecy. He saw in a flash what the hidden purpose had been, and feeble as he was, his heart leaped out to it with a mad delight.

"Isn't your name Hetheridge?" the man asked again.

"No," he answered, rolling his hollow eyes to meet his companion's gaze. "Who's Hetheridge? My name's Cashmore."

"H'm," said the man, in a tone expressive of some disappointment. "There's two of you been missin' at the same time then. Do you know this Hetheridge?"

"No," Hetheridge answered, faintly; "I never heard of him."

## CHAPTER VIII.

DAY by day the sick man gathered strength. So soon as he was able to sit up and to talk without difficulty, he found the position his own lie had forced upon him to be embarrassing. He was George Cashmore, a native of Birmingham, England—had been in the Colonies five years, and worked as a shearer—had made a little money in mining, and had lost it in speculation—had turned sundowner, and had wandered penniless from station to station seeking work. His knowledge of the country enabled him to map out the itinerary he pretended to have followed. He was at least exact enough to have deceived his rescuers if it had not been for one awkward circumstance.

The story was told at night, when both the men were present. They heard him gravely, with an occasional exchange of glances and an occasional question, in which he seemed to detect a jeering tone strangely at variance with the unfailing kindness they had shown him until now. When the whole mendacious narrative was completed, the man called Bill arose, pipe in mouth.

"It's a bit of a pity, mate," he said, with great gravity; "but you're a liar! That's what you are. You're a liar!"

"Who's a liar?" Hetheridge demanded, with feeble bluster.

"You are," said the other man, "and I'll prove it to you in a minute." He arose from the kerosene case on which he had been seated and lounged to a corner of the hut. "Them your bags?" he asked, throwing a pair of moleskin trousers on the floor. "I found them within twenty yards of where I came across you.

There's a pocket-book in one of the pockets, and there's pretty near a hundred pounds in notes inside it. It won't wash, your being a workingman won't. Why, look at your hands. You never did a week's hard labor in your life."

"What motive should I have," asked Hetheridge, "in deceiving you?"

"I don't know anything about motive," said Bill, still standing over him with disdainful aspect, "but you're a liar all the same. You told us you'd got on to the hard pan and gone sundowning; and here's between ninety and a hundred pounds in notes. Now what I want to know is—How did you come by that sum of money?"

"I had it to take care of," Hetheridge answered. "A mate of mine asked me to take it to his missis. I promised him on my Bible oath I'd do it, and so I will. I've had it a matter of two months, and never touched a penny."

"That may be so, or it may not," said Bill; "but you're a liar all the same."

"I thought," said Hetheridge, "that the money was lost. I never dreamed that I should find it again in this world. What was the use of moaning about it to you fellows? It never was mine, and I'd no right to think about it as mine or to talk about it as mine."

The explanation was plausible, but was insufficient for his hearers. They openly repeated their statement of disbelief, and turning their backs upon him, sat down to a game of cribbage with an exceedingly greasy and dilapidated pack of cards, the backs of which at least were as clearly figured as the faces.

From that moment there was but little communion between himself and his hosts, and he knew that he was disliked and mistrusted. Had he guessed of their discovery of the money, he would have told another story, and would have willingly divided their find between them. He knew that they suspected him of a meanness as stupid as it certainly would have been

base, and he was unreasonably angry with them. Rapidly as he mended, he was yet far from strong enough to venture away on foot, and to have attempted to bargain for any other mode of travel would have been to give himself the lie. He lingered on, therefore, and loafed about the hut or lounged in the shadow of the trees outside, disliked and disliking, until, when at length he felt himself able to face the world again, his parting with his saviors was as cold and restrained as could well be fancied. His trousers and boots had been recovered, and before any dislike of him had been aroused in the minds of his rescuers, one of them had given him a flannel shirt, and the other a dilapidated old apology for a hat. With these as his sole outfit, he parted from the hut.

"There's your way," said Bill, "across the ranges yonder, keeping the big peak to your right, and as soon as you reach the top you'll see Walkersville. There's half a dozen creeks on the road, so you'll have no want of water. You've got your day's tucker with you, and now good-by."

Hetheridge held out his hand, but the other made a point of not seeing it, and kept both his own in the waistband of his trousers.

"You saved my life," said Hetheridge, "you and your mate between you, and you think I'm ungrateful for it."

"We know you are," the man answered; "and so do you."

"If the money belonged to me," said Hetheridge, "you should be welcome to every penny."

"We don't want your money," the man replied, surlily. "You and your money can go to the devil together. There's your road."

With a final fling of his head toward the ranges he turned into the hut, and Hetheridge, with a piece of damper and a hunk of cold mutton by way of provision, wrapped in a piece of woollen rag, set his face toward the hills and addressed his footsteps to the trackless way.



He had but a dozen miles to travel in all, but that was enough, and almost more than enough, for a man in his physical condition. He reached the township when night was already settling down, and finding tolerable accommodation ate and slept in the one hostelry of the place. He was asked no questions, and his presence and aspect excited no comment or regard. He had been too tired overnight to give the matter a thought, but almost his first reflection in the morning was that his personal appearance must have been considerably changed by the beard he had grown, and by the privation and sickness he had encountered. He rolled wearily out of bed, and took up the little square of cheap looking-glass which lay upon a table at the window.

He had expected a change, but the metamorphosis he saw was absolutely astonishing. The whole character of his face, as he had known it, had disappeared. A physiognomist would have told him how the change came about; but he had no skill in that direction, and was simply astounded by the general result. The main thing was that the bitter mouth and obdurate chin of the man were hidden. The savage downward droop of the lips was lost beneath the mustache, which, though only five weeks old as yet, was fairly grown. Years of persistent shaving had made the hair wiry, and as yet it stood out in a lengthy stubble with scarce a symptom of a curl. Now that the savagery of the mouth was hidden, his eyes, still sunken after his recent illness, looked out with a mournfulness which was not without benevolence. The upper part of the face being hidden, he confessed that the lower had for the moment a touch of the released-convict look about it; but the incompleteness of the hirsute growth was a thing which time would mend. Even now, the beard was an improvement as well as a disguise. Critically examining himself for half an hour, and growing gradually accustomed to the change, he came to think that it would need a keen eye directed at him

with a special purpose to detect John Hetheridge in the man he looked at.

Having breakfasted, he paid his bill and walked out into the street; and having wandered indeterminately up and down awhile, he bought some few articles in the way of baggage and provision, and bargained for a horse and saddle. His equipment being completed, he rode off toward Melbourne, leaving a message and a written address for an imaginary personage who might make inquiries after William Fairbrother. He was careful not to leave this address in his own hand, and pretended an injury to his fingers as an excuse for troubling the landlord. On his journey down country he was fated more than once to hear the story of his own disappearance. That a man should wander into the bush, and be lost there forever to all human ken, was unhappily too common a thing to excite in itself much interest. But in this case the ill-hap was supposed to have befallen a prominent citizen and a man of wealth. In one little hostelry he heard a man, who professed to have known him intimately, estimating his fortune at two millions sterling, and solemnly declaring that he could vouch for this wild shot as a fact.

The first mention of himself made him shy and nervous, but by and by he grew accustomed to the sensation, and was interested to hear strangers discussing his affairs, the fashion in which the disaster had happened, and the probability of his having left an heir behind him. It was naturally interesting to speculate on the destiny of so large a fortune as the lost man was popularly supposed to have acquired. Even had imagination kept within the mark, as it so rarely does in kindred cases, the disposal of the missing man's fortune might still have afforded a fruitful theme of interest and speculation. He was currently believed to be without kindred, and he heard bets offered and taken to the effect that all his belongings would be impounded to the Crown.

This set him thinking at his wariest how to conceal

his identity and yet to obtain possession of his fortune. He forged scheme on scheme, and found none to satisfy him, until at last an inspiration occurred to him when he was within a single day of his journey's end. He provided himself with pen, ink, and paper, locked himself in his own bedroom, and wrote what follows.

"I, the undersigned, John Hetheridge, being at this time of sound mind and body, do hereby will and bequeath all moneys and properties whatsoever of which I may die possessed to the infant child, Ellice Hetheridge, now in charge of the Rev. Jordan Farrell, M.A., clerk in holy orders, at this same time incumbent at the parish church of St. John, Wellsted, in the county of Essex, England. I direct that within a month of my death the administration of my affairs shall rest in the hands of George McFarlane, merchant, of Collins Street, Melbourne, and James Fisher Wilkinson, accountant, of Elizabeth Street, Melbourne. I direct, further, that the administrators shall, at their discretion, realize all properties, securities, stocks and shares, and shall fund the whole of the moneys thus acquired in the consolidated three per cents in England, for the use and benefit of the aforementioned Ellice Hetheridge. The aforementioned Ellice Hetheridge shall be entitled to one hundred pounds per annum until she reaches the age of ten years; from then until the age of eighteen she shall be entitled to the use of two hundred pounds per annum; and on arriving at the age of eighteen she shall enjoy the free and complete control of whatsoever properties she may inherit from them. I direct further that my administrators shall pay themselves one thousand pounds each from my estate before disposing of the residue in the three per cents as already directed.

"(Signed), JOHN HETHERIDGE."

He antedated this document by three months, and read it and re-read it carefully. The more legal sounding phrases had a relish for him, and he read them in especial with a feeling of pride and satisfaction. He had often heard that it was madness for a layman to make his own will; but the keenest examination he could make detected no flaw or possibility of dispute as to the meaning of the document. John Hetheridge might efface himself for half a score of years, if the awful purpose which lay at the root of every thought and action should so long detain him, and yet when the time should have expired might return and claim his own. His way lay clear and broad before him

now, and the safe vengeance for which he had burned so long was in his grasp. He could have George Redwood's life and go scot free! There was no fault in the plan which filled his mind, no possibility of the detection of his purposed crime. The seeming disaster which had led to the current belief in his death seemed a sort of diabolic providence. The chance of self-effacement gave his old enemy into his hands without hope or remedy.

On the evening of the next day he reached Melbourne, and confident as he was of the disguise his altered aspect afforded him, he did not dare to enter the streets before dusk, or to approach his own house until the place was shrouded in darkness. Having made sure that the coast was clear, he scaled the low wall at the back, and stealing along the pathway with all the watchful tremor and precaution of a thief, he applied his private latch-key, opened the door, closed it behind him, with the faintest and most stealthy click, and made his way on tiptoe to his own study. Twice or thrice he paused and listened, and was sure the house was deserted. He had prowled round and about it more than once before his entry, and had seen no light or trace of habitation. Suddenly his knee struck a chair, which grated with a loud noise on the mosaic of the floor, and in his nervous terror he shook and sweated at this as if he had known the house to be full of listening ears and himself to have been the lurking thief he seemed. He had been guilty of no crime as yet, or shadow of a crime, but every thought and act led him one step toward murder, and the guilt of the deed was in his nerves already. He heard, or thought he heard, a stealthy padding noise behind him, and in the very act of turning found himself gripped by both arms in a grasp so strong that he knew instinctively he could not escape from it.

"What's your little game, matey?" said a voice he knew. "You come along here into the light, will you. Let's have a look at you. Lucky I happened to have

walked in this minute. Come, now, who are you? What's your little game?"

Speaking thus with an angry banter in the tone, his captor thrust him roughly along the corridor down a side passage into the servants' pantry, where a single candle burned dimly on the dresser.

Sam Potter—for the captor was no other than he—released his prisoner and set his back against the door.

"Now, matey," he said, regarding Hetheridge from head to foot without a sign of recognition, "what brings you here?"

"And what brings you here?" Hetheridge retorted.

"By the holy!" cried Potter, making a single step forward and then recoiling; "you ain't dead after all."

"Dead!" snarled Hetheridge. "Who said I was dead?"

"Everybody," Potter answered. "The newspapers. You've been given up for dead this four weeks at the least. There isn't a paper in Australia hasn't had the news in it."

"Well, I'm not dead, you see," said Hetheridge. "I'm alive and able to take care of my own. What thief's errand brings you here?"

"I'm not here on no thief's errand," Potter answered, coolly. "I've come for my missis's traps; they ain't worth much, but such as they are they're hers."

"Are you mad or drunk?" Hetheridge asked him. "You have the face to pretend that anything in this house belongs to you?"

"There's something in this house belongs to my missis."

"Your missis?"

"Yes, my missis. I'm married to Matilda Whiteley, which was your nursemaid to Bob Martin's little gel. I shall find Bob Martin's little gel yet; you mind that, matey. You didn't think when you give me in charge and got me quodded as innocent as ever was a new-born babe, you didn't think as I should come into a little fortune of four hundred pound a year and

go back to England with it, did you? Not much, you didn't. Well, I have, though. I'm agoin' back to England with my missis in the ship as sails to-night, and I'm going to make it my business to find out Bob Martin's little gel."

Hetheridge stood before him like a man confused, not daring to look him in the face least the man should see the murderous hate and rage which burned within him. Was all the planning of the last week to go for nothing? Was the half miraculou's chance which had put vengeance within his grasp to be lost by the intrusion of this clumsy idiot and booby? The obvious inutility of the impulse held him back from it, but he trembled with the desire to take him by the throat and choke the life from him.

Suddenly he went quite calm and quiet.

"Come with me," he said. "I'm not satisfied about you yet. I want to talk with you. Take up that candle, and go before me."

Potter obeyed, unhesitatingly; and Hetheridge marshalled the man into the business room. The shutters were fast, and a glance assured him that no gleam of light was likely to be seen from without.

"Now," he said, "explain yourself. You say you married my nursemaid. When?"

"This day fortnight. A week after I knew as I'd come into money. We're agoin' home to England, matey. The missis is aboard the vessel now, awaiting for me."

"And what part of England," asked Hetheridge, "might you be going to?"

"I'm agoin' to Upnor, in the county of Worcester-shire. That's where I'm agoin' to. I've come into my uncle's farm there. Reynolds his name was—Jack Reynolds."

Hetheridge with difficulty repressed a start. The man had named the very place in which for all these years the passion of his heart had centred.

"That's where you're going to, is it?" Hetheridge

said when he found he could trust his voice. He turned away and made a pretence of arranging the writing-paper and envelopes which lay in the little secretaire of varnished oak upon the table.

"Yes, matey," said Potter. "That's where I'm agoin' to."

Hetheridge saw his whole plan as good as dead—the thing he had longed for and thirsted for, yearned and burned for—torn from his grasp at the moment when his hand had seemed to tighten round it.

"And you're going to look up Bob Martin's little girl, are you?" he asked in a tone of commonplace.

"Yes," Potter answered, in a tone of mocking triumph; "that's what I'm going to do."

If there had but been a weapon to his hand! As the fancy crossed him, his hand fell upon a weapon—a native waddy, bought as a curio from a settler a year since, and lying on his table now. He lifted the slender handle with one finger, and looked darkly round at Potter, who had turned away from him in the swaggering certainty of his own triumph. Potter had set the candle on the mantel-piece, and close beside it stood a grotesque little work of Japanese art in ivory. He stooped to examine this, swinging his hat to and fro in his right hand; and seeing his enemy thus at his mercy, Hetheridge clenched the murderous instrument, and with one forward step dealt a double-handed blow at Potter's head. He struck with an inconceivable fury and with a force astonishing to himself. The man fell like a stunned ox, without a sound.

There was a moment of awful silence, and the waddy dropped from the wicked hand that held it. The murderer fell upon his knees and stared at the man he had stricken down. He put out a hand twice or thrice and drew it back again in horror before he dared to lay it on his breast. There was not a flutter at the heart. Not a sign of breath issued from the lips.

Hetheridge rose and stood looking down—a marked

man to his own fancy in that one awful instant. He was unconscious of the walls that closed him in. The whole wide world of human kind knew him and loathed him and pointed him out for doom. The brand of Cain was on him. He groped with a horrible feebleness in his own mind. He had never meant it—he would undo it if he could! He knew the futility of the lie.

The light of the candle sprang up and the paper packed about it flamed on a sudden. It was as if a voice had denounced him and a hand had seized him, and for an instant he was paralyzed with terror. There was a cold introspective faculty within him in spite of all the frenzy. "This is what you have done for yourself," the introspective critic seemed to say. "For the rest of your days you will start at shadows. Any little sudden thing will chill you with dismay. Your blood will tingle and your heart faint at a million trifles before your own death wipes out the memory of this deed."

It cost a fearful effort to set a foot beyond the prostrate body; but he made it. He drew the key of his safe from the pocket-book which had been returned to him by his rescuers a week ago, and turned the lock with shaking fingers that fumbled at their task. There were bank-notes in the safe—a great number of them—and one of his objects in visiting the house had been to secure this treasure. He stuffed the notes anyhow into his pockets, threw the unwitnessed will into the safe, and with one enforced reluctant look at the prostrate figure, crept on tiptoe from the room. The darkness of the corridor was full of threatening invisible figures, but he tore through them in an access of blind rage and fury, sought for the inner fastening of the door, and came out upon the night.



## CHAPTER IX.

LITTLE Mrs. Potter, her mind charged with the most direful memories of her voyage from home, got on board ship early, and immediately sought her berth, being determined to sleep away as much of the time as possible. She had charged Sam to be on board at least three hours before the vessel sailed, and since in these early days of married life her husband had obeyed her every wish—had, in fact, conducted himself with an astonishing subserviency and meekness—she had no doubt whatever that he would present himself at the time appointed. The little woman fell asleep, and did not awake until the vessel had passed the Heads, when she became conscious that the ship was pitching and rolling, and that she was about to be dreadfully unwell. She issued a feeble wail for Sam. No Sam responded to her call, and in a little while she had forgotten even him in the profound misery of sea-sickness.

For three days and nights she lay prostrate in the grip of that most agonizing of maladies, and when at length she was sufficiently recovered to make inquiries about her husband, she was hundreds of miles from land, with a voyage of three months' duration before her, and no possibility of news in all that dreary time. Her first discovery of the fact that Sam was missing was met with a wild hysteric search throughout the vessel, and a frantic questioning of every one she encountered. Then came tears and bewailings, and with them the consolations of her fellow-passengers. In all her grief and anxiety, she felt that her position gave her a certain importance. Everybody, without exception, from the captain to the meanest steerage

passenger, was curious and interested about her story, and she told it, first and last, hundreds of times. Everybody was sympathetic, and almost everybody took an encouraging view of the case, so that in a while, being of a disposition naturally sanguine, she grew to be quite certain that Sam had missed the ship by some trifling and unharmful accident, and that he would join her at home within a month of her arrival. Perhaps he might even take steamer and be on shore to welcome her when she reached England.

The Melbourne lawyer who had conveyed to Sam the news of his accession to fortune had supplied him with a sum of two hundred pounds, which Sam had, like a dutiful husband, handed over to his wife, subtracting only the amount necessary for the purchase of their berths. Her husband was thus left without money, but everybody agreed in assuring her that the lawyer would make no difficulty about a further advance; and as the voyage progressed she took a constantly brightening view of things.

There was no Sam to meet her at Blackwall, however, and that was a dreadul disappointment. There was a renewal of her tears, and for a while the little woman sat among her belongings on the wharf in a complete abandonment of grief and loneliness. Remembering after a time that she was at home again, and within reach of her friends and relations, she took heart of grace, summoned a hackney coach, saw all her belongings stowed about it and within it, and ordered the driver to a street off Gray's Inn Lane. Alighting there before a house, the whitened steps, trim muslin blinds, polished brass plate and door-handle, and bright new paint of which struck briskly on the eye in the midst of surroundings generally dingy, she rang the bell and waited in a state of fluttering expectancy.

A gaunt serving-maid, in a lace cap and a clean apron, answered the summons, and regarding the wealth of luggage on the hackney-coach made instant way for the visitor. The little woman had been crying anew,

and kept her veil down to hide her tear-swollen eyes; but she was no sooner within the hall than she clutched the gaunt serving-maid with both hands.

"O Selina!" she asked, with a new burst of tears, "don't you know me?"

"Know you!" ejaculated Selina, taken back by this unexpected greeting. "Lord bless you, not from Adam!"

Little Mrs. Potter raised her veil, and at the sight of her face the gaunt maid fell upon her and embraced her, crying shrilly upon Tilda. At this a formidable-looking female in black silk rustled into the hall.

"What is this, Selina?" she asked.

"It's Tilda," cried the maid. "It's Tilda Thoms."

"Dear me!" cried the formidable lady. "Is the world at an end because Tilda Thoms has come back again? How do you do, Tilda Thoms?"

"Very well, indeed, thank you, aunt," the little woman answered; "but I've lost my husband, and I'm broken-hearted."

"Lost your husband, child," said the mistress of the house in a profound contralto of astonishment. "Whoever knew you ever had a husband?"

Matilda, through her sobs, began to tell her story, but almost at its beginning Selina was ordered away, and the lady of the house gave her niece majestic audience in the front parlor. Tilda's aunt had always been a striking person to Tilda's fancy. Her position as the proprietress of a boarding-house of the select sort and the most unblemished reputation had surrounded her with a halo of respectability which was almost awful to contemplate. Tilda's father, who had combined the business of greengrocer and coal merchant, and had spent his later years in a chronic state of drink and impecuniosity, had held his sister in almost religious reverence, and had pointed to her lofty social standing as indicating the apex from which he had been torn by ruthless circumstances. Miss Thoms had never married, holding as she did strong views

with regard to the depravity of man at large, and having confirmed those views in the course of an observation extending over thirty years of casual and permanent boarders. These, though as select as she could make them, and ruled with a rod of iron by herself, were tarred with the brush of manhood, and were unanimous in their demand for latch-keys, a circumstance which to her virgin mind spoke volumes. The late John Thoms had given the most ample cause for her despatch of him, and beyond the fact that Tilda was her niece she had no great reason to love his daughter. But there was a heart in that majestic bosom after all, and when little Mrs. Potter had produced her marriage certificate and shown her wedding ring, the old lady was softened by her distress and loneliness, and had already begun to cast about in her own mind to discover in what way, with due regard to economy, she could best be of service.

When Matilda drew out the canvas bag of sovereigns which Sam had brought from the bank after cashing the lawyer's check, Miss Thoms kissed her niece with genuine affection, and when the legal papers establishing Sam's right to freehold property in the parish Upnor, in the county of Worcester, to the value of four hundred per annum, had been seen, the stately old woman's awakened feelings brooked no bounds. The special cake, and special sherry, reserved for visitors of high distinction, were set before the traveller, and Matilda was enshrined in her aunt's breast for ever as the most lovable of little women. She was mightily to be pitied, condoled with, and encouraged at the beginning, and later on to be installed in a chamber scrupulously neat and clean, with the promise of better quarters by and by.

"And now, Matilda," said Miss Thoms, with her hands spread out upon her black silk knees, and her figure a model of the bearing of propriety; "you must make arrangements so that your husband can find you when he comes back to England." To her mind, the

case against Sam Potter looked very black indeed, but as yet she would not give voice to her suspicions. In spite of Matilda's protestations as to her husband's sobriety, Miss Thoms was convinced that he had stayed on shore to drink with disreputable old-bachelor companions. To her way of thinking, the single state was a high virtue in womenkind, whilst for the members of the opposite sex it was the parent of all the deadly sins. A confirmed old maid was necessarily a pattern of propriety, and a confirmed old bachelor was necessarily a pattern of impropriety. A married man in the clutches of a bachelor contingent was on the road whose slope led swiftly to destruction. "You had better go," she continued, "to the lawyer whose name you showed me in these papers. Your husband will be certain to go to him when he reaches England, and you must leave your address."

Matilda, comforted greatly by her reception, promised to obey this common-sense counsel, and at her aunt's leading launched into a long description of Sam, his manners, history and aspect. She had a black-nosed cheap photograph of him, given in the early days of courtship, in which, with his wild hair and huge beard, the poor Sam was made to look like a most desperate cut-throat, with whom the marrying and desertion of unsuspecting maidens was likely to have been one of the merest of common pastimes.

Whilst the two were in the full flow of talk, there came a ring at the bell, and shortly afterward a gentleman of clerical aspect entered the room, and, taking up a book, retired to the back window and began to read. Matilda surveyed him with such evident astonishment and interest that after a brief pause, for propriety's sake, her aunt led her from the apartment, and questioned her whisperingly in the hall.

"I knew that gentleman in Australia," said Matilda.

"Did you, indeed, my dear?" replied her aunt.

"He was talking last night at dinner about it."

"I must find his name and address," cried the little

woman. "When Sam comes home he'll want to know it."

"I've got his card in my pocket now. 'The Rev. Jordan Farrell, M.A., St. John's Parsonage, Wellsted, Essex.'"

Matilda begged for the address, and after some demur and explanation her aunt surrendered the card to her keeping. The little woman thought it well to say no more than that the clergyman had in his charge the child of Sam Potter's dearest friend. The infant was an orphan now, she added, and Sam would think it his duty to see it was cared for properly.

Miss Thoms spent a considerable portion of the remainder of the day in the attempt to reconcile Sam's cut-throat aspect, as presented in the black-nosed photograph, with his reported tender interest in the fate of an orphan baby, but arrived at no satisfactory conclusion.

The Rev. Jordan Farrell said grace over the six-o'clock dinner, and was affably instructive to the boarders during the progress of the meal. Matilda was all eyes for him, and, naturally pleased to find an auditor so attentive and regardful, the reverend gentleman turned most of his talk her way.

The selected gentlemen of Miss Thoms' establishment voted him a bore, but the selected ladies, who were all elderly, all of a serious turn, and each with a microscopic competence, thought him delightful. Matilda would fain have asked after the Rev. Jordan Farrell's charge, but could not screw her courage to the point.

She had an unexpected meeting with him on the following day, when in pursuance of her aunt's advice she went to see the lawyer. The aspect of the offices frightened her more than a little. They were on the ground floor of a set of grimy chambers in Gray's Inn, as airless, as inconvenient, and as pervaded with odors of dry rot as the most conservative of lawyers could desire. She was kept waiting in an outer room for some

time, where the heads of a whole row of clerks bobbed up singly at uncertain intervals from behind a dirty screen of corrugated glass to stare at her, and after this ordeal to her nerves was ushered into a chamber where the gas was burning, though it was broad cheerful daylight outside, and where sat a severe gentleman behind a desk, wearing two pairs of spectacles at once, and as a consequence of this looking supernaturally keen and legal to her mind. The gentleman took off one pair of glasses to stare at her and put them on again to read the documents she handed him.

"Yes," he said when he had looked over them, "I know of these; but how did they come into your possession?"

"My husband gave them to me," she said.

"Well," he answered, "why doesn't your husband bring them here himself, instead of sending you with them?"

"My husband," said Matilda, feeling very much inclined to cry, "missed the ship. I suppose he's on his way to England now, but I haven't had time to hear about him."

"Well," the lawyer responded. "You'll have to wait until he comes here. Take the papers with you and take care of them."

"But suppose," she urged, "suppose he should have an accident. Suppose he shouldn't come back for a long time. Suppose I shouldn't be able to find out where he is."

"Then," said the lawyer calmly, "you'll have to wait. So long as your husband is simply missing it will be impossible to administer the estate. If at any time he should be proved to be dead, you could take out letters of administration."

"Oh!" cried Matilda, bursting into tears, "you mustn't talk in that way."

The lawyer took off both pairs of spectacles, polished them, and put them on again, but returned no answer. Matilda had cried so much during the last three

months that tears came easy to her, and their suppression, when once she had allowed them to start, was difficult.

"I don't think," said the lawyer dryly, "that there is anything more to say at present, Mrs. Potter. When your husband returns to England he will be sure to call here. You had best leave your address so that I can let him know your whereabouts immediately."

She was pretty in her way, was Matilda, and by Sam's affectionate care in Melbourne rather prettily attired, and even a lawyer can be human when he sees a pretty girl in tears. Her adviser gathered together all her papers for her, stowed them away in a huge legal envelope, and pressed the packet upon her with one hand whilst he patted her shoulder with the other.

"Come, come, my dear madam, don't give way. Your husband may arrive at any moment. There is no reason to think of anything serious in the accident of his delay. There, there. Good-morning, Mrs. Potter. Good-morning."

Matilda found herself in the outer cell in this congeries of legal dungeons before she had composed herself or had even drawn down her veil.

"This way, sir," said a clerk, as the door opened, and the little woman in her confusion walked plump into the arms of the Rev. Jordan Farrell.

"My dear young lady," said the clergyman, "I am sorry to see you in distress. What is the matter? Can I be of any service to you?"

"It is nothing, thank you," sobbed Matilda. "I am a little bit upset, that's all."

She pulled down her veil and made haste into the square, whence she hurried homewards. She loved Sam—that was indubitable. It was hard, very hard, to lose him. But to think that for so long as he might choose or be enforced to stay away she herself might be compelled to rely upon her own efforts for a livelihood, made the loss of Sam no more tolerable. She married Sam because she loved him—certainly;



but when she married him she had been promised that she should be a lady for the rest of her lifetime. A hundred and forty pounds was a great sum, and she had never in all her life till now had so vast an amount at her disposal; but after all it was a poor equivalent for an assured four hundred a year, and thoughts of possible poverty beset her mind. It would be unreasonable to stay on with Aunt Thoms, eating the expensive bread of idleness, whilst her fortune diminished until at last she should be forced to put her hand to the plough and extort her own living from the stony soil of the world.

“Suppose,” she said to Miss Thoms on reaching home, “that anything dreadful has happened to my husband. My money would soon go, and the lawyers say they can’t give me any more until he comes home unless I can prove that he’s dead. Oh! oh! oh! I’d better find something to do, aunt. I shan’t find time to grieve so much as I should if I was idle.”

Aunt Thoms concurred, and whilst the two were still talking there came a ring at the bell, as on the previous day, and, as on the previous day, the Rev. Jordan Farrell entered a moment later.

“I hope I do not intrude my sympathies,” he began in his formal clerical manner; “but I fear this young—ah—young lady is in some distress. Even in worldly matters I may not be incompetent to advise, and if I am *really* not intruding——”

Miss Thoms would only be too grateful for Mr. Farrell’s advice. Matilda was equally willing to benefit by his experience. The tale was told in a sustained duo, but was brief and simple enough to be understood at once. Mr. Farrell commended the young—ah—lady’s resolution. It was common-sense. It was indicative of—ah—courage. He would be pleased if it were in his power to advance the—ah—young lady’s wishes. Had he not, he asked, peering doubtfully at her over his glasses, had the advantage of meeting her somewhere before?

"It must have been in Melbourne," said Matilda.

"In Melbourne?" asked the clergyman in some surprise. "Do you know Melbourne?"

"Yes, sir," Matilda answered. "I was at Mr. Hetheridge's, at St. Kilda, when you and Mrs. Farrell came to take the child away."

"Dear me," said Jordan Farrell. "Were you the——"

He knew the intense respectability of Miss Thoms, and had already been introduced to the young—ah—lady as her niece. He dared scarcely do justice to his reviving memory for fear of causing her offence.

"Yes, sir," said Matilda. "I was the nursemaid at Mr. Hetheridge's."

"Dear me!" said the reverend gentleman. "*In-deed*—is that so? *in-deed*."

"I've got a little money, sir," pursued Matilda, "and of course my husband might come home by any ship and claim me, and then I should have to go back to him; but if he doesn't come home by the next ship I must begin to think of doing something, and if you wouldn't mind, I'm sure the little girl was used to me, and she'd take to me again quite kind, I'm sure; and I should be better to her than anybody else would, because her father was my poor Sam—Sam—Samuel's dearest friend."

This last statement sounded a little enigmatical to the clergyman, but it might so easily have been true that he forbore to question it for the moment.

"The child's father," he said, "is dead, and I am in town on a matter connected with the administration of his estate. That estate," he continued, with the complacency of a man who speaks of large sums of money, even when they are not his own, "is more than considerable. Indeed, I may say without exaggeration that it is vast. On her coming of age at eighteen, my youthful charge will inherit a sum approaching, even if it does not exceed, half a million sterling. The education—even the earliest education—of a child des-

tinued to so large a sphere of influence in the world must be conducted with judgment and with caution. I will advise Mrs. Farrell of your niece's proposal, Miss Thoms, and will communicate her answer to you in the course of a few days." With that he rose, bowed, with a due sense of the unchanged relationship existing between himself and Miss Thoms, and of the changed relationship which existed between himself and Matilda.

"My dear," urged Miss Thoms, who herself was not insensible to her niece's altered condition, "you might have chosen a less menial condition."

"I don't know, aunt," Matilda answered. "It's the only kind of work I know anything about, and I'm sure there's nothing I should like better."

The two or three days the clergyman had spoken of passed by. They brought a steamer direct from Melbourne, but they brought no Sam Potter, or news of him. There came, however, a letter from Mrs. Farrell authorizing her husband to engage Matilda, and when the time came for the clergyman's return, the little woman packed up her plainest raiment and travelled with him down to Essex.

## CHAPTER X.

IT was the seventh anniversary of the marriage of George Redwood and Ellice Greenaway. The day fell upon a Sunday. The yeoman sat in an old-fashioned, high-backed chair, after breakfast, over his morning pipe and a copy of the *Weekly County Journal*. He was already attired for church, except for coat and hat, and these, brushed to their last nicety, lay on the table beside him ready to his hand. He sat in the Sunday morning luxury of shirt-sleeves, enjoying his pipe with the consciousness of rest and leisure, not so deeply interested in the story of the preliminary meeting of the Hunt Club but that he could find an occasional eye for the sunlit garden and an ear for the voices of the house. He strayed restfully over the local intelligence, until on a sudden the heading of a brief paragraph startled him into a profound interest. He read the paragraph twice over, and then rising walked to the foot of the stairs, which led direct from the chamber to the upper regions of the house.

"Ellice, my dear," he called, "just come down here a minute, will you? I've something to show you."

His wife's pleasant treble answered from above, bidding him wait a minute. He walked back to his chair, and sat smoking rather solemnly until his wife descended with a rustle of Sunday silk.

"Why, George," she said, "you're looking as serious as a crow; what's the matter?"

"Was I, my dear?" said George. "Here's an odd bit of news now. Listen to this: 'It will be within the memory of our readers that somewhat less than two years ago we published the news of the melancholy disappearance of Mr. John Hetheridge, a native of Up-

nor, of this county. We now learn from the Australian journals that the provisions of the unfortunate gentleman's will have been completely carried into effect. The whole of his estate has been realized, and the proceeds, amounting to more than a quarter of a million sterling, are funded in the English three per cents for the benefit of his infant daughter. A stated sum has been set apart for alimony, but the bulk of this great fortune will be allowed to accumulate until the young lady reaches the age of eighteen. We learn that the heiress is in the charge of the Reverend Jordan Farrell, M.A., the incumbent of St. John's Church, Wellsted, Essex.' "

"Why, George," said Mrs. Redwood, "that'll be an enormous fortune by the time the child comes in for it."

"Yes," George assented, "it's a lot of money. Poor old Jack Hetheridge! He must have had a rare eye for the main chance, though great fortunes do seem to grow out there like mushrooms. You might have done better than you did, my dear."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Redwood. "As how, George?"

"You might have had that quarter of a million," George answered, smiling seriously up at her.

"My dear lad," his wife responded, shaking her pretty head with a smile as serious as his own, "you've got your faults, and I've found 'em out by this time, but there isn't another man in the world could have made me as happy as I have been. I have never wanted more money than we have had, thank God. I can think kindly of poor Hetheridge now, but I never could abide to think of the man when he was alive. I've never been sorry for my bargain, George."

"Nor I for mine," said Redwood. "You're a lot smarter than I am, for you've found out my faults and I've never set an eye on yours. That's your cunning in hiding 'em doubtless, for being a woman you're bound to be chock full of failings, big and little."

At that the wife laughed merrily and stooped to kiss him, and just then the church bells began to ring.

"There," said Mrs. Redwood, smoothing the locks her husband's caress had disordered, "I shall have to do my hair again, and we shall be late for church. That's one of your faults, George. You can never let a body kiss you without hugging like a bear. I wonder how often you brought my back hair down before we got married, and made me ashamed to look my own mother in the face. Go on with your pipe and paper. I'll be back in five minutes."

She ran merrily upstairs, and her husband shouldered his way into his coat, left his newspaper on the table, and took his pipe into the garden, where he wandered up and down with an eye for the ripening fruit upon the trees. His thoughts were still with his old rival, and more than once he murmured to himself of poor old Jack Hetheridge, "Poor Jack!"

In due time Mrs. Redwood appeared with his hat and gloves, took his pipe from him, skimmed into the house with it, and returning gave a series of final touches to his tie and whiskers, turned him round for inspection, pronounced him fit to be seen for once in his life, and marshalled him off to church, quite as proud as she had been on that eventful day seven years ago, and a great deal happier.

In a quiet place like Upnor, any stranger is noticeable; but the married pair had not gone a hundred yards upon their way when they encountered a stranger who would have been noticeable almost anywhere. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, but gaunt as a greyhound, and tanned almost to blackness by the sun. He wore a great beard and moustache, so sun-scorched that it had grown to be of no particular color. He was dressed in respectable pilot cloth, and wore his double-breasted peacoat close buttoned. A broad-brimmed soft felt hat was stuck carelessly at the back of his head, and he smoked a short black pipe—an almost incredible thing for a man of respectable exterior to do in the streets of Upnor on a Sunday. In those days, when almost all men shaved scrupulously,

the beard alone would have given the stranger a wild and outlandish aspect. But apart from this, there was at first sight something *outré* in the man's appearance—a something in the large pale gray-blue eyes, which, in their contrast with the tanned skin, looked almost colorless—an expression as of one lost, a look altogether weird and uncanny.

The stranger nodded as he passed, and said, "Good-day," in civil fashion, and Redwood returned his salute.

"That's an odd-looking fellow, now," said Redwood, turning a hundred yards further on to look after him.

"But what a troubled face, George, dear," replied his wife. "The man looks as if he had gone through a world of misery."

"You women folk," retorted George, "are always fancying things. I'd lay a wager, for my own part, that the fellow was one of those rollicking chaps that never know what trouble is from year to year."

"You'd lose your wager, George," his wife responded tranquilly; "but I don't suppose that either of us'll be able to find out anything about him, so where's the use of quarrelling?"

"Ah," said George, comfortably pressing the arm which lay within his own. "Where's the use of quarrelling?"

They entered the church-yard, filled with scattered groups of church-goers, exchanging harvest notes, news of the market, and all the little gossip of the place. The old church clock, by which all clocks and watches in and about Upnor were regulated, showed yet seven minutes to the hour, and George and his wife lingered at the church-yard gate and exchanged "good-mornings" with their neighbors. Whilst they stood thus the bearded man came in sight again, looking uncertainly about him, as if in search of some one to appeal to.

"George," said Mrs. Redwood, "there is that man

again. He wants to speak to some one, I can tell by his manner."

Redwood had already set a foot forward with intent to cross over to the stranger, when the man turned and accosted the individual nearest to him—an old fellow who, though a thousand times odder than himself in aspect, excited neither curiosity nor regard. He, too, went bearded, in defiance of the general law, and was the more remarkable in that respect because the beard was of the most strange and unusual red. Elf locks of the same color fell below his ears. A much battered, unbrushed, old silk hat, a good deal too big for him, obscured his brows, and he wore blue glasses with a sort of blinker on either side. He was bent double at the hams, and his hands quivered paralytically on the pair of sticks which supported him. He was dressed in very shabby and dirty black broadcloth, and what with his general slovenliness, his shuffling step, and hang-dog carriage of the head, looked to be a very disreputable old man indeed.

The stranger stretched out a hand and laid it on the old man's shoulder as he shuffled past.

"I say, matey," he began.

The old man gave a nervous start, as if the grip and the sudden accost had fairly frightened him.

"I'm not a-goin' to hurt you," said the stranger. "You've got nothing to jump like that for. Tell me the way to Reynolds' farm."

"I—know—not," the old man answered, with a strong foreign accent, and as if he found his words with difficulty. "I am 'ere sree monce. No more."

He waved one of his sticks in the direction of the church-yard gate, as if to indicate that there were people there who would be able to give the information asked for, and so shuffled paralytically on again. The stranger turned in obedience to the gesture and Redwood made another step forward.

"I beg your pardon if I'm wrong," he said, "but my



wife here thought you wanted information. Can I give you any?"

"Why, yes," the stranger answered. "If you know the country-side you can."

"Well," said Redwood, with a little laugh. "I ought to know that if I know anything else."

"I want to find the way to Reynolds' farm," said the stranger, knocking the ashes from his pipe on the palm of his great brown hand.

"That's easily done," said Redwood. "There's the farm-house over yonder; that red-brick building with the three poplars behind it. But you'll find nobody there. The place has been going to rack and ruin this two years past."

"Nobody there?" said the stranger, falling back a step and staring at him. "Nobody there? Not Mrs. Potter?"

"No," said George; "nobody."

"Look here, matey," said the stranger, hooking him by the coat and speaking with a look and manner curiously and almost pathetically composed. "I've had a deal of trouble lately, an' I make mistakes. This is Upnor, in the county of Worcestershire, ain't it?"

"Of course," Redwood affirmed.

"Well, look here," said the man; "if you belong about here, you can't have helped hearing talk o' me. My name is Sam Potter. My uncle was old Jack Reynolds, and when he died he left me everything."

"I'm very glad to meet you, Mr. Potter," Redwood answered cordially, putting out his hand.

Sam Potter took it half mechanically.

"And my missis isn't here?" he said. "We hadn't been married a month when we lost sight of each other. I know she got to England, for I've talked with the man aboard the ship she sailed in. I've been trying for this two years to get here, and why she isn't here before me I don't know."

"George, dear," Mrs. Redwood interposed; "don't you trouble about church this morning."

"You're right, my dear," said George, "I won't. Come down to my house, Mr. Potter. If you don't mind we'll have a talk, and maybe I can be of service to you. You've been away a long time, haven't you?"

"A goodish time," returned Potter, passing his hand over his forehead as if to smooth a disordered thought.

"Well, shall we go?"

"Yes, we'll go, matey, and thank you kindly."

The bell began to tingle spitefully as if in minatory warning to late worshippers, and then stopped suddenly. Mrs. Redwood passed into church and the two men walked down the street together.

The bent old foreigner quivered on his sticks a few score yards away, but save for that quaint figure the road was deserted.

"That's a queer old chap," said Redwood, more for the sake of making talk than for any other reason. "An old French fellow. I don't suppose he speaks a hundred words of English, and as it happens there's nobody in Upnor that can change a word with him except myself. I'm no great shakes of a Frenchman, but I've got a sentence or two, you know, and I think the old boy likes to hear his native language now and then."

They were level with the old man a minute later.

"Bong jour, André," cried Redwood. "Commong voo portey voo, ce mating?"

"Bien, monsieur; tres bien," the old man answered.

"That's right," said Redwood. "Il fait botong, eh?"

The old man gave an inarticulate grunt of assent, and Redwood and Sam Potter pursued their way together.

"It pleases him," remarked the yeoman complacently, "to come across a bit of his own tongue now and then. That's about all I can give him, but you can see it brisks him up a bit."

Sam answered that he dared to say it did, and walked on thoughtfully until Redwood ushered him

into the house. Potter sat down and set his hat upon the table. He drew out his pipe, a huge plug of tobacco, and a clasp-knife.

"You don't mind, matey?" he asked.

"Not a bit," George answered. "I'll have a smoke myself.

"I suppose," said Sam, shredding his tobacco coarsely and rubbing it between his palms. "I suppose you knew my uncle?"

"I knew him," Redwood answered, "as well as I knew anybody."

"I suppose," Potter began again, "as nobody could be likely to come down here and make inquiries without your hearing of it?" Redwood shook his head. "And you never heard about my little missis?"

"Never. I heard of you, of course; but I never even knew that you were married."

"I got married in Melbourne, in Australia," said Potter. He had packed his pipe by this time, and now striking a lucifer match on the leg of his trousers, he pulled away for half a minute in silence. Then turning in his chair, he asked suddenly, "Did you ever hear of a Mr. John Hetheridge, of these parts?"

"We were boys together," Redwood answered him; "schoolmates. It's seven years to-day since I saw the last of him. Poor old Jack! He was lost in the bush and died there."

"I'm — if he did!" Potter said, slowly and weightily. "Look here, that man was no more lost in the bush than I was, or you was, or the babe unborn was."

"Why, look at this," cried Redwood, snatching the paper from the table and searching hastily for the paragraph he had read to his wife that morning. "Read that."

Potter read it, tracing the lines with a clumsy forefinger.

"Oh, I know all that," said Potter. "I met him in Melbourne when the news was stale. He'd been dead

six weeks when I came across him. I met him in his own house. He give me a smack at the back of the head, matey, as laid me there for dead. I was in the hospital twelve months along of it. Off and on my mind's mythered with it now, and I suppose it always will be."

"But why should Jack Hetheridge have wanted to do you an injury?" asked Redwood.

"That's more than I can tell you, matey," Potter replied. "The only thing I know is, he done it."

"How did you know him?" Redwood asked. "What brought you in his house?"

"I don't remember," was the unexpected answer. "There's heaps of things I can't remember." He passed his hand across his brow again, rubbing it heavily as if by the mere physical pressure he hoped to straighten the inward tangle. "No," he said, hopelessly, "I can't remember."

He looked at Redwood with an eye altogether vacant, and the yeoman feared that he had made acquaintance with a madman. He had had no experience of that genus, and he thought it reasonable to try and argue Potter out of what seemed an obvious hallucination.

"You say," he began, "that you saw Hetheridge six weeks after he was reported dead?"

"Yes," said Potter, "that's the truth."

"Did you think it was his ghost?"

"No; it was him right enough. Ghosts can't hit a chap and put him into hospital for twelve months. The back of my head was all bashed in like, matey."

"What motive could he have?"

"Oh, he had motive enough. You make your mind easy about that, matey."

"Well, what was it?"

"My head goes wrong," said Potter. "I get it sometimes all as clear as daylight, and then it goes away again. There's only one thing as I don't forget. I never forget as it was Mr. John Hetheridge that

done it. I shall find him some day, and when I find him I shall have his life."

All this was, of course, to Redwood's mind the merest madness. There was no reason for giving the poor man's story so much as a moment's credence. It was doubtful if he were even the man he supposed himself to be. To fancy he was Reynolds' heir and nephew might easily be as dreamy and unreal as the rest. Redwood sat thinking thus, puffing his pipe in silence, and had begun to consider how it would be easiest politely to dismiss his curious guest when Potter struck the table with a heavy hand.

"I've got it," he said almost passionately. "It was all about Bob Martin's little gel. Bob was my pal, and it was my right to take charge of his little gel when he got murdered. Now, I put that to any honest man—if it wasn't a pal's right more than a stranger's to take charge of a matey's kid when he got murdered?"

Had Redwood known the story he would have followed Potter easily; but as it was the man's speech sounded like the merest gibberish.

"I said to him, 'Look here,' I says, 'it's this way, matey; I've come in for my property, and me and my missis is goin' to England by the ship as sails to-night. I shall find my matey's child,' I told him, 'if it costs me every penny in the world. You mind that,' I says; 'I shall find her whithersoever she may be!' With that I turns my back on him and he knocks my brains out. I remember it now," he concluded, "as well as if it was yesterday."

Redwood was unaffectedly sorry for the poor fellow, but little disposed to give credence to any of his fancies.

"I suppose," he said after thinking for awhile, "that you came through London?"

"Yes," replied Potter.

"Well, did you call on your late uncle's lawyer?" Potter shook his head. "I suppose you know who he is?"

"It's slipped my mind, somehow. I don't remember."

"Well, as it happens," Redwood said, "I do. I'll write his address down for you. There's a telegraph office only thrèe miles away at the railway station. You walk over there in the morning and send a message to the lawyer. You ask him if he knows where your wife is. That's the best thing for you to do, you know."

"Yes," said Potter. "That's the thing to do."

## CHAPTER XI.

POTTER had carried such effects as he had with him to the Black Bull, and at that decent hostelry he took up his residence for the time being. He told his story to anybody who would listen to him, but never succeeded in making it more intelligible than it had seemed to Redwood. What with his naturally blundering style of narrative, and his lapses of memory, he succeeded for the most part in working his hearers' minds into a complete tangle, and the universal impression was that he was crazy, and that his story was without foundation. His own inaction gave color to the general opinion. He took no steps to communicate with the lawyer whose address Redwood had given him, and made no attempt to discover the whereabouts of his wife in any other way. He loafed about the village, sometimes unreasonably hilarious and communicative with strangers, sometimes morosely uncivil at intrusions he had himself invited, but generally in a patient stupor which would have been pitiable if his true story and condition had been known.

One thing was abundantly clear to the village intelligence. Potter's story of Hetheridge's reappearance was mad—absolutely and definitely mad. No man who was alive to prevent it could possibly allow estates so vast as Hetheridge had left behind him to pass away from his possession. Had the man been poor, or in legal difficulties, or in dread of the police, a motive for self-effacement might easily have been found. But in Hetheridge's case there was no reason discernible, and the public intellect, such as it was, flouted Potter's ill-told and disjointed tale.

In his earlier Australian days, poor Sam had fallen

in with most of the manners and customs of his comrades with conspicuous readiness. One habit prevalent among them, perhaps more honored in the breach than in the observance, was that any man who received a check for service rendered should instantly proceed to the nearest place where drink could be obtained, and should there "knock down" that check. It had not been thought the right thing to do this in solitude, and the customary manner was either to select a comrade or comrades with whom to get drunk, and keep drunk till the whole of the money was expended, or to "shout" indiscriminately for any houseful of loafers the moneyed man might light upon.

For the first five or six days of his stay the Australian was but an unprofitable client to the Bull. He had surprised the landlord by egregious orders for cold tea, which he drank by the quart. It was made of an unheard-of strength and bitterness to suit his palate, and formed the only liquid refreshment he indulged in. He was known, however, to have a pocketful of money, a gold watch and chain, and some other valuables; and since he insisted on paying up his score with absolute regularity before breakfast, his whims were respected, and he was permitted, though not without some grumbling, to have his way.

Tramps of all sorts passed through the village, which lay midway between two union workhouses, and in these shabby wayfarers Potter took a curious interest. It is probable that they reminded him of the swagsmen who had for so many years been familiar to him. He scanned the tribe day by day as if he were searching for some special man amongst them, and at last he seemed to find him. He stopped a burly, jovial-looking blackguard in the dusty road.

"Morning, matey," said Sam. "How's things with you?"

"Pretty bad," said the tramp.

"Looking out for a job?" Sam asked.

"You got one to offer?" the tramp retorted.



"Yes, I have."

"What is it?" the tramp inquired, with all the caution of his tribe. He was not so madly anxious to get to work that he was willing to set his unaccustomed hands to any unspecified labor chance might offer them.

"I want a man," said Sam, with perfect gravity, "to drink fair along o' me."

"Oh," jeered the tramp, suspecting mockery in this simple and natural statement. "What's the wages?"

"A dollar a day," Sam responded.

The tramp stared hard at him, but there was no light of humor in Sam's eyes. The offer seemed too heavenly to be real, and yet the man who made it looked sincere.

"A dollar a day," said the tramp. "To drink fair along o' you. I'm on. I'll take the first day's wages in advance, and I'm ready to begin at once."

There was a little trembling hope in the tramp's bosom, the least infantine fluttering beginning of a hope that this amazing offer might be real. But he seemed to feel his heart turn over when the solemn stranger drew out a handful of gold and silver from his pocket, selected two half-crowns from the glittering pile and dropped them in his outstretched palm.

"Now, mind you, matey," said Sam Potter, "you're in my service as long as this check lasts. You've got to drink fair, you understand that. There's to be no greed, and there's to be no shirking. Fair play between man and man is what I expect and what I look forrad to."

The tramp bound himself by a grisly oath, and Potter led the way, well pleased with himself and his man. On his way to the Bull he paused at the village ironmonger's, and by way of giving an air of Australian reality to the solemn festival on which he was about to enter, bought two tin pannikins. One of these he gave to the tramp, and himself carried the other.

"What do you say to rum to begin with?" Sam asked as they walked on side by side.

The tramp, whose brightest hopes had not carried him beyond the limits of six ale, turned faint at this glimpse of heaven.

"Yus," he said meekly, "I've nothing to say agen rum to begin with." His spirit quailed within him at the thought that rarer and more elysian splendors might await him.

They entered the house and sat down together in the tap-room; and Sam having called for a bottle of rum and paid for it on the nail, they began solemnly to drink together. There was no unseemly revelry about the business, but all was done decently and in order. Plug tobacco and matches in plenty were provided, and the two sat in silence, the tramp keeping an observant eye on Sam and drinking when he drank; and oh! he thought, if this might last forever!

At noon they left the room for steak and onions, and the tramp was blessed beyond the measure of mortal man.

In the wilds which through long use had come to seem native to him, Sam would have found no one to interfere with his freak; but he found the English folk conservative and ill-inclined toward innovation. The landlord stepped in in the course of the evening and put a stop to supplies. The tramp became abusive, and was given in charge. Mr. Potter, inarticulately protestant, was put to bed; and by this means the orgy was brought to a speedy close. But poor Sam, like so many of his class, found it impossible to leave off drinking when he had once begun, and he took to mooning boozily in the tap-room or bar-parlor all day long. He was perfectly quiet and inoffensive, but willing to buy drinks for all the world, and the landlord began to have a certain esteem for him. Redwood would drop in sometimes of an evening and chat for five minutes whilst he drank a glass of home-brewed ale, and he stood one night in the parlor when Potter was sitting alone in the tap-room with an open door.

"That's a queer sort of fish you've got here, Fulton," said Redwood, in his cheery voice.

"Ah," returned the landlord, who was under the impression that Sam had gone out and had not yet returned. "You mean that there Potter fellow, Mr. Redwood. Now, what do you make out about him, if I might be so bold as ask you?"

"Why," said Redwood, with a little drawl which seemed to indicate that he desired to weigh his words, "I should think that in his right mind he'd be a likely simple sort enough."

"Yes," the landlord assented. "There don't seem to be any kind of harm about the chap. You don't believe his story, Mr. Redwood."

"No," said the yeoman. "I can't say I do. I think the poor chap's cranky. It's like enough that one part of his tale is true. He says he got a knock on the back of his head, and he confesses that it turned his mind a bit; but as to his having seen Jack Hetheridge weeks after the poor man was known to be dead, why, of course, that's madness, and no one but a madman would believe it. Hullo, André. Commong voo portey voo, eh? Fulton, here's old André with his bottle. Voo vooly doo cognac. Eh?"

The old foreigner set his bottle down on the pewter-covered window ledge with a trembling hand, and fumbled in his pocket for the money for his intended purchase.

"Fill it up, eh, André?" asked the landlord.

"Oui, Monsieur," the old man answered. "Yes, feel heem op."

"Voo parly bien l'Angly by and by," said Redwood.

He felt a little natural pride in his own accomplishment, and his neighbors were distinctly proud of him as of a man who could do Upnor justice in foreign parts if ever it should please fate to carry him so far. It was true that Redwood disclaimed an intimate knowledge of the French tongue, and professed only the most modest pretensions in regard to it, but this

was looked on as a mere personal characteristic. He was none of your bragging fellows, was Redwood. A straightforward, honest chap, who never laid claim to anything in particular, and whose performance was always a little better than his promise.

The landlord had set the tundish in the neck of old André's bottle, and was just about to pour into it a measured pint of brandy when Sam Potter shouldered clumsily into the room.

"Look here, mateys," he began thickly, "who says I'm a liar? Where's the man amongst you? Let him stand up and have it out fair and square, *like* a man."

There was no answer, and every one felt the episode a little awkward.

"It was you, wasn't it?" Potter asked, turning upon Redwood. "It was you as said I was a liar?"

"My good fellow," Redwood answered, "I said nothing of the kind. I dare say you believe everything you say, but I don't think you quite know what you're talking about."

"Don't I?" Potter returned. "You come outside, and we'll see about that before you can say knife."

He began to pull off his coat, but was immediately surrounded.

"Come, now, Mr. Potter," said the landlord; "there's nobody in this house that wants to quarrel with you, and I'm sure you don't want to quarrel with nobody. A peacefuller or amiabler gentleman, drunk or sober, as the case may be, I never made the acquaintance of. You don't want to quarrel, Mr. Potter?"

At this combined tribute and appeal Sam became instantly mollified. He shook hands all round, and proposed the most Christian sentiments to all the world.

"You've got me, matey," he told the landlord. "You've described me proper. There ain't a man alive as can say Sam Potter ever harmed a fly, nor yet he wouldn't. Now what are we all a-goin' to take to drink?"

"Now come, come, Mr. Potter," cried the landlord,

patting him comfortably on the back, "you've took a little more than's good for you a'ready. You go and have a little bit of a stretch now in the fresh air. That's the thing to do you good."

"All right," said placable Sam, and bidding everybody an affectionate good-night he walked out as well as he could into the village street. He strolled on vacantly for a minute or two, and then turned to find the bent foreigner shuffling at his heels.

"Hullo, matey," he exclaimed; "you'll come and have a drink, won't you?"

"Sank you," the old man exclaimed; "I veel."

"That's your sort," cried Sam, and took him by the shoulder with intent to draw him back to the Bull.

"Not zat vay," said the old foreigner; "zis vay. Come viz me."

Sam yielded, and the old man shuffled and hobbled at his side until they came to a disreputable-looking public-house. The old man, signing to his companion to follow, entered and led the way to a room which smelt of stale tobacco smoke and reeked with old fumes of beer.

"Nobody com' 'ere," said the foreigner, seating himself. "I ring a bell, eh?" He reached out a shaking hand and pulled at a frail old cord which depended from the ceiling. A cracked tinkle answered from without, and a slatternly girl came in. Sam gave his order, and the girl obeyed it, and the two were left alone together. "I like you," said the foreigner in his difficult and halting English. "Nice man, eh? but frighten, oh! too easy frighten."

"Who's too easily frightened?" Sam demanded.

"You," said the old foreigner.

Sam was bellicose on a sudden, and smote the table so that the glasses jingled.

"Look here, matey. You show me the man as says he ever see me afraid of anything, and I'll wring his neck for him. Where is he? Show him to me."

"'Ere," said the old man; "'e is 'ere."

"But look here, matey," Sam argued, "I can't wring your neck. You're a elderly man, you are. That's what you are; and besides we're a-drinking together. I can't set about you, you know. That don't stand to reason, does it?"

"I thought," said the foreigner, with his elbows on the table and his chin sunk between his hands; "I thought a big man like you would not be frightened."

"I ain't, neither," Sam responded. "Not me! No fear."

"You are," said the other, in his level, monotonous foreign voice, and with no change of attitude.

"Look here, matey," Sam returned, with drunken ponderosity of emphasis. "No. I'm not a-goin' to call you matey. I shall call you Boss, because you're an elderly man, and it's more respectable. Now, look here, Boss, you tell me the man as Sam Potter is afraid of."

"You are afraid at Redwood," his companion answered.

"Afraid of Redwood!" Sam blustered. "Why, I could break him across my knee. I could tie him into knots."

"Of course you could," said the old man. "That is vhy I vonder. You are frighten without cause."

"I'll show you whether I'm afraid or not," said Sam, staggering to his feet and tossing off his glass of liquor which stood before him. "You drink up and come along with me, and I'll show you who's afraid."

"Ah," said the mischief-maker; "now you speak like a man."

"You come back to the Bull," cried Sam, who was in a condition to fight armies by this time. "I'll show you something. You see me knock chunks off him."

"You are brave man now. That is vat should be. Good man now! Brave man! Strong man!"

"I'll knock a hole through him," Sam protested, "as if he was a drum-head." He flung open the door, dived into the passage, and so into the street, the for-

eigner following with more agility than might have been looked for in him, his newly-filled brandy bottle tucked away under his left arm, and his two sticks held together in the right hand.

"You vill be frighten again ven you get zere," he whispered, but Potter disdained to reply, and forged ahead with gloomy purpose. His will was good, but his progress was by no means rapid. Before he had reached the little hostelry he had walked four or five times the necessary distance, and by the time he passed the door would probably have forgotten all about the purpose which took him there if his malicious tempter had not been still at his elbow.

"If I was so strong as you," he said, "I should kill him."

The witless Sam rolled royally into the house, and shouted for Redwood. He used dreadful epithets, and was so obviously in a state of drunken frenzy that all the men in the establishment fell upon him simultaneously, and held him from the possibility of mischief.

"You frighten of 'im," said the old foreigner when the hubbub had so far subsided that he could be heard. "He not dreadful. Too much frighten himself."

At this Sam's drunken rage mounted so high that by a tremendous effort he launched the men who held him right and left, and tearing out of the passage, made at full speed for Redwood's house, breathing threats and slaughter. Nobody followed, and when he had got out fairly into the country lane his causeless rage deserted him almost at once. He fell into a hedgerow, and went contentedly to sleep there for an hour or two, awaking in time to walk home just before the hour of closing.

The foreigner had made a great to-do about following him, and had even gone out with a pretence of pursuit. It was no more than a pretence, however, for at the first corner he made a *détour*, and shambled away toward his own residence—a lonely cottage half a mile away from the village.

## CHAPTER XII.

"I DON'T suppose I shall be actually late, my dear," said Redwood to his wife; "but you'd better not sit up for me. I've got two or three people to see, and I must get through this business with old André."

"Do you think he's got the money to buy the cottage, George?" the wife asked. "He doesn't look as if he had a penny in the world."

"Well," George answered, laughing, "if he hasn't got the money he won't have the cottage. If he wants it I'd as soon sell it as keep it. And anyway, I shall be able to tell you all about it in the morning. Good-night, dear. Don't sit up for me, but get your beauty-sleep. I want to keep those roses."

He pinched her right cheek, kissed her with a husbandlike carelessness, put on his hat and struck out across the fields. The sun was setting, and the shadows of the elms in the hedgerows were of enormous length. The day had been stormy, and the sunset was a rifted splendor under a dense pent-house of purple clouds. The puddles in the roadway blazed with the reflected glory of the western sky and accentuated by their startling brightness the cold and sombre look of the landscape. Old André's cottage sent forth a furtive blink from its wet window-panes nearly a mile away, and a curl of faint blue smoke rose from the chimney.

As Redwood drew nearer, he saw the old man standing in his doorway as if on the lookout for him. He waved the thin switch he carried as a signal, and marched on briskly. The sun dipped below the horizon line, and the shadows which had lain upon the ground seemed suddenly to throng into the air. The



leadен zenith reflected no beam from the sun, and night seemed to come on at a single stride. Redwood experienced a sudden chill, and even a sense of dismay. He was not accustomed to such feelings, as a man more sensitively attuned to the moods of nature might have been. He resented it, and threw it away with a conscious effort.

The cottage he approached was his own property, and had been familiar to him from childhood; but tonight, standing alone in the wet and chilly fields, with rifts of the fast-fading splendor of the west behind it, and the leaden sky above it, it wore for a moment an inexplicably eerie look, and there was something strangely remote in its aspect, as if in place of being the every-day thing it was, he had travelled to it from a great distance.

The door of the cottage was open, and gave immediately upon the living-room of its occupant. This chamber was sparsely furnished, and, without being distinctly dirty or untidy, looked as if it would have been the better for a woman's hand. A lighted candle stood upon the table, and a small fire was burning in the grate. The room was empty on Redwood's entrance, but at the noise of his footstep the old man came in carrying a bottle and a pair of tumblers. He set these upon the table, and his shaky hand motioned his visitor to a seat. He himself took a chair, clasping the table with both hands in order to sit down with surety, and in silence poured out a glass of brandy for himself, and pushed the bottle across the table to his visitor.

"No, André," said Redwood, "I won't drink tonight. I've three or four calls to make, and if I take a glass at each of them I shouldn't be no fit sight for the wife when I get home again. We can soon get our business over. Barley, the land agent, gave me your message."

"Eef you drink not," said André, "I do no beezness."

"Oh, very well," responded Redwood, laughing,

"I'm not so particular as all that." He poured out a little brandy, half-filled the tumbler with water, and drank. "Now," he said, setting down the empty glass, "that scruple's over. How much are you disposed to offer for the cottage?"

"You sell, I buy," returned André. "Vot you vant?"

"I want a hundred and twenty pounds," Redwood answered.

"No," said André, shaking his head, "too moche. A 'undred."

"No, old chap," said Redwood, lightly, "a hundred and twenty is my bottom price. I'd have taken more if you'd offered it, but I shan't take less. It's a fair price, and I don't particularly want to sell."

"A 'undred," André persisted. "Poor man," he added, tapping himself upon the breast; "not a rich man, poor."

"Oh, I suppose you've got a stocking somewhere," Redwood answered, laughingly. "Poor men don't buy houses even if they're as small as this is."

"Eet is too moche," André urged again. "A 'undred and five, eh? Come, say a 'undred and five."

He watched his visitor intently from behind his goggles, and somehow Redwood disliked his look. He had had a sort of fancy for old André. The outlandish figure, the broken speech, the shy, suspicious, reticent ways of the man, had made him interesting. Redwood, without in the least suspecting it, was natively a bit of a *connoisseur* in human nature, and had an appetite for human oddities. He was himself a fairly keen bargainer, but the intent eagerness with which his companion regarded him seemed to betoken a ravening desire to have the better of him such as only an abnormal miser could experience. The keen gaze shifted in a moment before Redwood's glance.

"This place of yours is beastly close, André," said Redwood. "Let's have this door open."

The old man made no sign either of assent or dissent,

and the yeoman, opening the door, stood at the threshold for a moment, and drew in one or two great gulps of air. As he turned to resume his seat, he staggered slightly, and recovered with a look of anxiety and surprise.

"What the deuce is this?" he asked. "I'm feeling very uncommonly queer, old boy. Give me a drink of water."

He dropped into the chair he had quitted the moment before, and put his hand to his forehead with a vague uncertain gesture.

"I've taken something," he said, "which has disagreed with me."

The old man was standing over him in an attitude of alarmed concern.

"You are not vell," he said. "A leetle brandy. 'Ere is my glass. I 'ave not touched it."

He held the tumbler to his guest's lips, and Redwood, with a faint sickness upon him, drank the neat spirit. André stood over him, glass in hand, and watched intently through his darkened glasses.

"By George!" gasped Redwood, "I'm worse than ever. This is devilish queer. I don't like it. The house is going round with me."

He was nauseated to the soul, and there was an extraordinary numbness in his limbs, and when he tried to think of a reason for these strange and alarming symptoms his mind was like the worm on a worn-out screw which will not bite. He had no mental hold on anything. The nausea grew intolerable, and the numbness weighed more and more heavily upon him. These sensations terrified him, but in a very little while he found himself drowsily thinking they did not matter. Nothing mattered. He was sinking into some profound abyss, falling with a whirling speed which might have been horrible at another time, but just now nothing mattered. He touched the bottom with no shock and had scarcely time for a sick surprise at this when absolute oblivion fell upon him.

The old foreigner set the tumbler noisily upon the table and stood erect. The paralytic trembling of his hands had ceased, and when he moved it was with a swift and assured step. A clumsy locker stood in one corner of the room, and dragging open its door he took out a handful of stout lengths of rope. He crossed back to where Redwood lay unconscious in his chair, and kneeling before him tied his ankles tightly together, knotting and reknitting the cord with a vehemence of action and looking the helpless man in the face meanwhile. When he had done this he rose suddenly to his feet, and with a stealthy tip-toe swiftness locked and barred the door. Next he passed into an inner room, and emerging with the same tip-toe stealth and rapidly with a pair of blankets seized a chair, and mounting on it curtained first the window and then the door. There were nails driven into the wall above the door and window, and the edges of the blankets were already pierced with holes as if in anticipation of the purpose they were put to. This done, the man went back to Redwood, throwing his darkened glasses aside with a gesture of impatience as if they impeded him. He knelt behind the quiescent figure this time, and drawing the lax arms to the rear of the chair bound them wrist to wrist, and elbow to elbow. Every movement was characterized by a savage vehemence, and yet everything was ordered, rapid and assured. The unresisting man was bound below the knees to the legs of the chair he sat in, was bound across the thighs to the chair, was fastened to the chair by the waist, then beneath the chair a cord was passed from pinioned wrists to pinioned ankles, drawn tight and secured with knot on knot. When this task was completed, the last length of cord had been used and it was evident that the manner employed to secure the body had been deliberated on and arranged beforehand. The man tested his handiwork everywhere and found it secure. His prisoner had as little chance of escape as a trussed fowl.

His captor took up the candle from the table and walked again for the second time into the inner room. He set down the light upon a miniature chest of drawers on which were spread out razors, a shaving brush and bowl and a large pair of scissors. The window behind the chest of drawers was already obscured by a blanket curtain. A cheap oblong looking-glass in a frame of stained wood lay upon the bed. The man taking this propped it against the wall, set in the candle in position and taking up the scissors began to cut away his beard and mustache, holding a sheet of newspaper below the falling hair. When he had clipped as closely in this manner as he could, he began to shave. The razor turned once or twice in his hand and each time inflicted a little gash. He took great pains to stanch these trivial wounds, and when he had achieved this to his satisfaction, he pulled off the elf-locked wig he wore, and placing it with the hair of beard and mustache upon the newspaper, folded it with precision into a parcel and carrying it into the next room, set it on the fire and built up wood and coal to insure its absolute consumption. Returning to the inner room, he drew from beneath the bed a well-used small portmanteau, and unlocking it, took out an ordinary morning suit of gray tweed, a white shirt, a silk necktie, a pair of Oxford shoes, and a complete set of underclothing. Then seated on the bedside he proceeded to undress, throwing his shabby raiment article by article into a corner of the room. The whole cottage was filled with the bitter odor of burning hair. He dressed leisurely and precisely, took a fashionable hat of the shape then worn from a box beneath the bed, and from a pocket in the portmanteau drew a gold watch and chain, some loose gold and silver, a bundle of foreign bank-notes, and a ring with a large brilliant set in it. He put the ring upon the little finger of his left hand and toyed with the brilliant for a moment in the candle-light. Next, having adjusted watch and chain, and bestowed the roll of notes in an inner

pocket in his waistcoat, he walked back into the next room and took a chair opposite his prisoner. He sat looking at Redwood for a full hour without a movement. The stormy day had sunk into a stormy night, and the wind's secret hand was rattling at the doors and windows, and the rain was noisy on the roof. The drugged man made no motion and only his stertorous breathing showed him to be alive.

Another hour went by and the watcher grew impatient, moving on tip-toe from one room to another without apparent purpose. At length there came a break in the monotony of Redwood's heavy breathing, and he began to groan and mutter. The candle had burned down almost to the socket by this time, and, clouded by a huge drooping wick, left the room in a half-darkness. The watcher sat with intent eyes fixed on Redwood's face. The muttering and groaning became more continuous, and at last the captive yawned and blinked his eyes. Then as if a defeated intent to move had roused him, he stared round with an awakened alertness, and, meeting his captor's eye, uttered one hoarse shriek of horror and amazement, dragged at his bonds until the veins stood purple on his forehead, and finally sat exhausted, struck through and through with terror and wonder.

"Jack Hetheridge!"

"You're surprised to see me, ain't you, George?" said the watcher, with no trace of his late accent.

The tremendous shock of his awakening to the other's presence had banished the effects of the narcotic, and every faculty of Redwood's mind was in instant life and action.

"What does it mean?" he asked. "What brings you here? Why am I tied like this?"

"You shall know everything in good time, George," said his captor. "I've waited seven years for this meeting, and before I've done with you we're going to have a little talk. Didn't I tell you that I was a dangerous man to cross?"

Redwood returned his gaze in silence, but his mind was alive to a thousand whirling suggestions. The most insistent of them all was this—but for his own stupidity he might have found a warning in Potter's story. A caution against Hetheridge had been thrown in his way as if by Providence. He had disdained it, and had walked to his own doom. The instinct which told him that his old rival meant nothing less than murder was too strong to be denied.

"You bear me that old grudge," he said. "You've nursed it against me all these years."

"Yes," his enemy answered, with a horrible complacency. "I've nursed it all these years, George, and now I'm going to have a feed out of it. I've got you this time I fancy."

"What do you mean to do?" Redwood asked. He needed no answer to the question. He had read his rival's purpose at the first moment of his recognition of him.

"All in good time, George," said Hetheridge. "I haven't come to that yet. When you robbed me of Ellice Greenaway I swore my Bible oath I'd be revenged. I kissed the book on it, George, more than once. It wasn't worth while to hang for a mean thief like you, and I made up my mind that I'd wait till I could do it safely. How do you feel now, George? What do you think now of all the lies you told behind my back to blacken me and steal my sweetheart from me? — you, what do you think of 'em now?"

"I never told a lie about you in my life," said Redwood steadily.

"You're a liar now," said Hetheridge, "and you were a liar then. But you'il tell no more lies about me, George."

His face was of a devilish pallor. What little light the candle gave fell full upon it, and his eyes glittered redly as if they were surcharged with blood.

"You mean to kill me," Redwood said.

"You've hit it, George, first pop," Hetheridge answered, "I've meant it this seven years, and by and by I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it quite safely, George, and that's the beauty of it. I shall get off scot-free. There isn't a soul in the world who would ever so much as dream that I had a finger in it."

Redwood sat frozen with the horror of the situation. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and he had no word to say.

"I should never have found out how to do it," Hetheridge went on, "if it hadn't been for that lucky accident of my being lost in the bush. The papers said that I was dead, and that gave me the first idea. I put all my money away in such a fashion that I could come to life at any minute and have it back again. You always thought that I was a fool, George, didn't you? That isn't the only question that you and me have differed about, is it? I'm pretty — smart, I can tell you. It took me two years to study up old André Dom. I lived in France to do it. I worked like a nigger all the while, George. They say that when an Englishman's past twenty he can never learn to speak French like a Frenchman. Can't he? You ask me and I'll tell you a different story. I'd have learned ten languages if they'd been needful."

"You wicked villain!" Redwood groaned, finding his tongue at length.

"That's right," said Hetheridge, taking a cigar from his pocket and lighting it at the candle. "You take your innings now and I'll do the looking on."

"Look here, Jack, my lad," said Redwood. "You've got me helpless here, and you can work your wicked will on me. But you mark my words. If I never get out of this place alive you're just as much a dying man as I am. There's a God in Heaven, and I'd sooner stand in my own shoes than I'd stand in yours. If you mean murder——"

"And I do," said Hetheridge.



"Come on and get it over. If my last hour has come I can face it. I leave myself and you to the God that made us both."

"There's one thing I didn't tell you, George," said Hetheridge, biting the end from his cigar to make it draw more freely. He leaned forward with both elbows on the table so that the light of the candle no longer fell upon his face. His eyes blazed even then, and though there was a terrible tense vibration in his voice, he spoke with extreme deliberateness. "I'm going to marry the widow."

Redwood uttered an inarticulate cry of rage and agony. He struggled with his bonds like a madman, but only to tear his wrists and ankles with the ropes that held him. He ceased from pure exhaustion and sat still once more.

"Wouldn't you like to beg your life, George?" his triumphant captor asked him.

"No," said Redwood, with set teeth and gleaming eyes. "I wouldn't. Do your worst and have it over."

"I'm in no hurry, George. I shan't have the chance to do it twice, and I don't want to spoil it. Did you ever hate anybody, George?"

"I never did, thank God," said Redwood.

"Then you can't guess," said Hetheridge, "what a time I'm having. I've waited seven years for it. I'd have walked through fire to get it any time, and now you see I've got it."

Redwood closed his eyes and strove to close his ears to the taunts of his triumphant enemy. He prayed inwardly for his wife and child, besought pardon for his own offences, and awaited his end with a stoic courage which perhaps few men would have shown.

"Oh, you've shut your eyes to it, have you?" Hetheridge jeered at him. "Can't you look death in the face, George?"

"You'll do that one day," Redwood answered, "and then, God help you."

At that instant the candle flared in the socket and expired.

"There's light enough from the fire," said Hetheridge, "for me to do my business by. Now, George, here's a bit of blind cord—a yard and a half of it. It isn't much, is it? But I think you'll find it enough. There's not going to be any pistol or dagger work here. This is cleaner and quieter and quite as satisfactory."

He rose with the cigar still between his lips, and walked behind his victim's chair. With an unfaltering hand he passed the cord round Redwood's throat, strained upon it with his full force, drew both ends round to the back again, and tied them there. Then he tore the blanket from the door, turned and withdrew the key, locked the house on the outside and made off in the darkness.

The rain had ceased, and here and there about the sky a faint and troubled light was seen. Little by little the clouds were drawn apart until a watery new moon shed a dim and tearful light upon the landscape. There was an awful sense in Hetheridge's mind that the deed done was past recalling, and though he knew that if it were redone a thousand times, he would enact the scene anew each time with the same unflinching zest of hate, its accomplishment weighed upon him none the less.

He threw the key into a pond a mile away from the cottage and walked on to the assured safety which lay before him. Yet a silent horror filled all the waste spaces of the night.

## CHAPTER XIII.

HE knew every yard of the country, and a walk of some fifteen miles lay before him. He had barely covered two when he arrested his footsteps to count the strokes of a distant church clock. The clock struck ten, and he found that he had nearly three hours and a half in which to complete his journey. Until then he had walked hurriedly, but finding himself with ample time in hand he settled down into a steady pace of four miles an hour, and holding to it found himself in the streets of the great midland capital with a quarter of an hour to spare. He sauntered to the railway station, booked for London, took his seat in an empty first-class compartment, and was whirled away.

During the whole of his night's walk he had been horribly excited, and a thousand fears had shocked upon his mind, but in the main he had been conscious of a fierce exultation the like of which he had never felt before. The deed to which he had looked forward with so passionate a yearning for seven years was done at last. He had repeated it in memory hundreds of times already, and his satisfaction had not yet begun to pall. He would have been happier if Redwood had proved a craven in his last hour and besought his mercy; and remembering his victim's steadfast courage he tightened the murderous cord in fancy. His fingers ached at last with the constant strain his imagination forced upon them.

Only a few spots of rain had fallen during his walk, but now the storm began again, and what with wind and rain, the rolls of wheels, and the groan and clatter of the carriages, he had an orchestral accompaniment to his thoughts which well-nigh maddened him. Some-

times it seemed as if a whole supernatural world were battering at his sheltering-place with a clamor of hatred and denunciation. Sometimes the roar of the mechanic monster tearing through the night, was like the voice of his own madly exultant soul. Through it all he had the deed to do over again in an ecstasy of hate and triumph, and before his journey was over the repetition had grown hideously monotonous. Do what he might he could not drive it from his thoughts. He exulted in it yet, but he was weary alike in brain and body, and he was bound to his own thought, and dragged along by it as if it had been some remorseless engine. Round, and round, and round, beginning with the first offer of the drugged brandy, going on with the binding of the unconscious figure in the chair, and ending with the tightening of the wicked cord—round and round, and round. Never resting for a second, never missing a detail or changing the order of an action.

He reached Euston in the dark of the autumn morning and left the station unobserved. He walked through the lonely gas-lit streets by the Pentonville Road past the Angel, along Essex Road, down the New North Road into Old Street, and so on to Shoreditch. He broke his fast at an early coffee stall and walked on unnoticed to the Eastern Counties Railway Station. There he stood for a few minutes whilst a shoeblack cleaned his boots, which were heavy with country soil. Within the station he bought a daily paper, and in its columns he looked unreasonably for some intelligence of the murder. He knew very well how impossible it was that any knowledge of the crime could as yet have reached London, but in spite of that he felt a certain disappointment in finding no allusion to it. All the while without intermission his thoughts travelled the same intolerable monotonous circle. He was inexpressibly weary by this time, but there was no escape for him.

He was in fair time for the early Parliamentary train

to Colchester, and taking a ticket thither, was once more borne away. He had a travelling companion this time, an inoffensive, quiet, elderly gentleman who folded himself in a great number of wrappings and at once composed himself to sleep. Meek and unobtrusive as he was, his presence was a burden hard to bear, for it imposed upon Hetheridge the necessity for a careful watch upon himself. The anguish of that monotonous repetition in his mind, the dreary insatiable horror of it so weighed upon him, that he could have groaned aloud. He dreaded to reveal any sign of his own mental state, and sat resolutely still and silent, though at every repetition of the deed his tired hands had a longing of their own to clutch the cord and draw it tight again.

The day broke desolately, with streaming rain-clouds on the horizon. The flat fields were everywhere sodden with recent rains, and the landscape was as monotonous as his own solitary and ceaseless fancy. The train seemed to crawl, and though he was in no hurry to reach his destination he was full of an angry impatience at its slowness. His head was heavy and hot with the fever of the sleepless night, his eyeballs burned, and from head to foot he ached with fatigue. Sleep was an impossibility. There was no repentance or beginning of repentance in his mind. No regret, or shadow of regret, but his crime had sentenced him already to the endurance of an unimaginable boredom.

At half-past ten o'clock he reached his destination for the time, and having washed and breakfasted, went into the town, purchased a hand-bag and a small supply of linen and underclothing. Next he hired a fly and was driven to Wellsted, travelling the dreary circle of his thoughts the while. Alighting at the one respectable hotel of the town he secured quarters for the night and inquired the way to the house of the Reverend Jordan Farrell. The landlord took him into the street and pointed out the parsonage, a building of mellow red brick standing a little back from the road-

way. Hetheridge walked toward it and lingered at the gate for a moment. A passing errand-boy, with a basket on his arm, turned to stare at him, and he moved quickly through the gateway and walked along the gravel drive. A trim maid answered his ring at the hall-bell.

"The Reverend Jordan Farrell lives here?" he asked her.

"Yes, sir," the maid responded. "What name shall I say?"

"Hetheridge, John Hetheridge."

Hetheridge was dazed with want of sleep and the un-resting mill-round of his memory. The girl bade him enter once or twice before he noticed her, and then waking with a start from his preoccupation, he entered the house and was shown into an orderly sitting-room where a big clock upon the mantel-piece—a skeleton of a clock under a glass shade—ticked noisily. Here he was left alone for some five minutes, the noise of the clock grating upon his strained nerves like a rasp. At last he heard a footstep in the hall and the clergyman entered. Hetheridge rose and stood before him, and for a moment both were silent. The visitor stood unconsciously with his back to the light, and his face was in deep shadow.

"In what way, sir," Farrell asked at length, when the pause had had time to grow a little awkward. "In what way, sir, can I have the pleasure of being of service to you?"

"You know me, Mr. Farrell," said Hetheridge.

"I cannot say I have that pleasure," Farrell responded. He made a forward motion as he spoke and Hetheridge turning at that instant, he sat down upon a chair which happened to be near with a low cry of astonishment, "Great heaven!"

"You are surprised," said his visitor. "I suppose, like the rest of the world, you thought me dead."

Farrell, for a little while, was too agitated to speak, and he made an evident effort to regain his self-posses-

sion. Even when he had recovered from the first shock of his amazement his lips twitched and his face was colorless.

"I thought you dead, most certainly," he answered. "Your estate has been administered long ago. To what strange accident do you owe your preservation?"

"I was found," Hetheridge answered, "by a pair of stockriders, fifty or sixty miles from the track I had wandered from. I was insensible and near death's door at the time. The men nursed me, and for a long while I was light-headed. Even when they brought me back to health I had a sort of cloud upon my mind and could remember nothing. I had forgotten my own name, my own affairs. There was an old envelope in my pocket-book addressed to a man named Tiverton, up in New South Wales. I had scribbled a memorandum on the back of it, some business matter I wanted to remember, and that is why I happened to have kept it. The men who had found me called me Tiverton. I put up with the name. It was as good to me as any other. It was a good couple of years before the cloud lifted from my mind, and when it did I came over here to straighten affairs up again."

Farrell, who had even now only partially recovered from the stupor of astonishment into which his visitor's most unexpected advent had thrown him, gave a little, half-hysterical laugh, and scraping his shaven chin with thumb and finger, murmured that it was very curious—very curious indeed.

"You are not looking like yourself even now, Mr. Hetheridge," he said.

Hetheridge caught at the phrase. It afforded him the first chance he had of giving voice to the agony he suffered.

"Don't look myself," he answered. "Great God, man, how do you expect a man to look like himself who's been through what I have?"

"I—I beg your pardon," the clergyman stammered meekly, half frightened by the wildness of his com-

panion's tone and manner. "It is of course not to be expected that your appearance should have suffered no change. But you are indeed to be congratulated upon your truly miraculous escape."

"There was nothing miraculous at all about it," Hetheridge answered, gruffly. "If I am to be congratulated at all, you'd better begin at the beginning and congratulate me on having lost the track."

This view of the case looked so novel to the clergyman that for the moment he had nothing to say to it, and so, like a judicious man, kept silent.

"How's the child?" asked Hetheridge, suddenly.

"I think you will be gratified," the clergyman responded, "alike by her physical and mental progress. She is quite a beautiful little creature, and is universally admired. You would, of course, wish to see her at once?"

"No," said Hetheridge, "I'd rather not see her now." The last contact he had had with any fellow-creature was in his mind. He had not touched a hand, or so much as brushed a human figure with the skirt of his coat since the murder of George Redwood, and there was a half-blind fancy that he might dare to touch the child more easily when that barrier between her and himself had been broken down. He had no care for her, no affection for her, and yet, in a sense he could not have defined, the baby innocence was dreadful to him. He felt that some explanation of his refusal to see the child was necessary. "I am not master of myself," he added, therefore, hurriedly. "I might frighten her. I have gone through a great deal, Mr. Farrell. I've endured more than you fancy. I've endured things that would have driven some men mad for life."

It was an unspeakable relief to him to reveal his torments even in this veiled way.

"I can conceive, sir," said the clergyman, "that you must have suffered terribly."



"Suffered," cried Hetheridge. "If you want anybody to know what hell is, send them to me."

He had done the deed, which for seven long years had been the one passionate inspiration of his soul. He had no fear of detection; he was going to escape scot-free, and yet he spoke but the bare truth when he confessed himself in hell. This was whither one night and half a day of triumph had carried him. Whilst he spoke and whilst he listened, as his tired mind surveyed a hundred trifling speculations, and his heavy eyes took casual note of unnumbered nothings, the unending round of memory had to be travelled. He killed George Redwood once a minute come what might. There was no mercy in that abominable iteration.

"You spoke just now," he said, forcing himself by a prodigious effort to an outward calm, "about the administration of my estate. I suppose, in that case, they found my will?"

"Certainly," Farrell answered. "It was unwitting; but in the absence of all other evidence, being undoubtedly in your own handwriting, and having been found in your own house, it was naturally held to be quite valid. Everything has been funded in behalf of your infant daughter, in accordance with your directions."

"I shall have to take the necessary steps," said Hetheridge, "to recover the possession of my property. I presume there'll be not much doubt about my identity. I shall stay here for a day or two, I think, and then I shall go down to Upnor, in Worcestershire. It's my native place, and though I've neither kith nor kin there, I should like to see the old spot again, and half a score old friends or so."

"Upnor, in Worcestershire?" said Farrell, questioningly. "That's odd."

"I don't see anything odd about it," Hetheridge answered in a tone of anger.

"No, no," cried Farrell. "Why should you? But

it is odd to me, because yesterday a member of my household started for Upnor, in answer to an urgent telegram. There is a curious coincidence in the case too, now that I come to think of it, for the message came from a person who, like yourself, Mr. Hetheridge, had mysteriously disappeared in Australia, and had long been mourned as dead."

Hetheridge had no difficulty in coupling the missing Australian now in Upnor with Sam Potter, though why Potter should be in communication with any member of Farrell's household was a mystery to him.

"That *is* a bit of a coincidence," he admitted, not suffering himself to seem too interested.

"The man," pursued Farrell, as if answering the unspoken question in the other's mind, "is the husband of the young person who has had charge of your infant daughter, Mr. Hetheridge. She was in your service as nurse-maid when Mrs. Farrell and myself accepted our infant charge from your hands."

"Matilda Thoms," said Hetheridge. "She got married, did she? I should have thought she was too young for that. She was only a chit of a girl."

He knew that it would be well for him to see as little of Potter as possible, but he made up a ready mind to dismiss the girl from her present service. There was no reason why she or her husband should cross his path again.

He left his address with Farrell and went back to his hotel, where he had taken a sitting-room, but finding the loneliness of his own chamber intolerable after awhile, he descended into the bar-parlor and listened to the talk of the landlord and his guests. There was no relaxation of the mental pains, no change in the sequence of events which haunted him. He drank one or two glasses of brandy and then went to his own room to dine. He found an old volume of an old encyclopædia there, and tried to interest himself in it, but found the effort hopeless. He sent away his meal scarcely tasted, but emptied the bottle of port he had

ordered with it. His mental and bodily fatigue weighed like lead upon him, but he suffered from a ghastly wakefulness, and almost despaired of sleep. As the night drew on he called for a bottle of brandy, and carrying it to his bedroom drank greedily glass after glass until at last his head began to spin with the fumes of the liquor. He undressed unsteadily, drank a final bumper, and rolled into bed. Sleep fell upon him instantly, sleep dreamless and profound. A splitting headache awaited him in the morning, but his torment was over. He could put the deed behind him now, and the harassed nerves had time to recover their normal strength and tone.

It was late when he awoke, and he dawdled listlessly through the day until the arrival of the London papers. They came in a little time before the hour at which he had ordered dinner, and in the columns of the *Times* he read a detailed account of the discovery of George Redwood's body.

"The unfortunate man was not missed until the morning after his death. He appears to have warned his wife not to sit up for him, as he had business which might keep him out late. Mrs. Redwood retired and slept soundly until her usual hour for rising, when she was startled to discover that her husband had not returned. The deceased was a man of regular and sober habits, and his absence was, therefore, the more remarkable. Inquiries were at once instituted, and a statement was elicited from Joseph Davies, a neighbor, to the effect that he had seen Mr. Redwood enter the cottage of one of his own tenants about sunset on the previous evening. An inquiry at the cottage was attempted, but the place was locked and apparently tenantless, and it was not until later in the day, when it was discovered that the tenant of the cottage himself was missing, that a forced entrance was made. The unfortunate gentleman was then discovered bound hand and foot in a strong old-fashioned oaken chair. He

had evidently been dead for more than twelve hours, and a piece of blind-cord was found tightly drawn about his throat. The motive for the deed is shrouded in the completest mystery. Mr. Redwood and the occupant of the cottage were apparently on the most friendly terms, and it has transpired that Mr. Redwood's object in visiting him was to arrange terms for the sale of the cottage to its occupant. The man's name is André Dom, and he announced himself as a native of the Puy de Dome. He had been resident in Upnor for about three months, and is said to have been of an eccentric and solitary disposition. The man's disappearance and the fact that the murder was committed in his house, affords so strong a proof that the police express no doubt as to the perpetrator of the crime.

"Later.

"A man giving the name of Samuel Potter, who professes to have returned quite recently from Australia, has been arrested on suspicion of being at least an accomplice. On the night before the murder he was heard to utter violent threats against Mr. Redwood, and on that night itself was seen in a drunken and excited state walking on the path which leads from the cottage to the village. It is now clearly known that the victim was drugged before the commission of the crime."

Hetheridge had scarcely read the statement through when a hurried rapping sounded at his door and Farrell came in with a newspaper in his hand. The paper rustled as he held it out, and he was so far startled from his usual prim and starched propriety that he could scarcely speak, and altogether failed to notice the excitement which blazed in Hetheridge's eyes or the death-like pallor of his face.

"You have seen the news?" he gasped.

"The news!—what news?"

"The news from Upnor. Matilda's husband—the

man of whom I told you yesterday—has been arrested on a charge of murder.”

“Murder!” cried Hetheridge. “Whose murder? I know every soul in Upnor.”

“A Mr. Redwood,” Farrell answered, “is the victim. A man most highly respected, as I gather from the story here.”

Hetheridge tore the paper from his hands and made a pretence of hunting for the column he had read so recently.

“Redwood,” he cried in pretended horror. “Not George Redwood? Not my old friend George?”

“George Redwood was the name. A yeoman farmer, cultivating his own land. He leaves a widow and one child.”

“Poor George!” groaned Hetheridge. “Poor Ellice; what a fate!”

He sank into a chair, his elbows falling on to the table and his face hid in both hands. Once more it was a relief unspeakable not to hide emotion. The clergyman stood astounded, almost paralyzed. He thought he had never seen a grief so terrible. The man's sobs shook him from head to foot, and it was a full five minutes before he lifted his tear-stained and distorted face.

“I loved her better than I loved my life,” he cried wildly. “Poor Ellice, this will break her heart.”

Even if the Reverend Jordan Farrell had been a physiognomist he would have had no reason to doubt the genuineness or the nature of his companion's emotion, and as things were he pitied Hetheridge as much as it was in his somewhat pinched nature to pity anybody. He offered the usual formalities of consolation, the vacant chaff well meant for grain, which is the staple of the professional consoler.

Hetheridge had no need for his soothings. The hysteric fit was over and he felt the better for it. He had played his part even in the very torrent of his own

passion, and he flattered himself that he had played it well.

There would be a rare hunt after André Dom, he thought sardonically, but it would be a long chase before they caught him. André Dom had disappeared from the face of the earth, and the inheritor of his crime and triumph was scot-free.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE Black Bull at Upnor had never driven so thriving a trade since it first opened its hospitable doors and gateways for the entertainment of man and beast. The eye of the world was fixed on Upnor for the moment, and the Upnor tragedy furnished a daily half column to every journal in England. Representatives of the leading London and provincial newspapers made the Back Bull their rallying-place, and two boys were especially retained to ride with telegraphic messages from the Bull to the nearest railway station. The gentlemen of the press, though very friendly with each other out of business moments, fought shy one of the other while at work, and each one prosecuted his inquiries with a solitary stealth which would have been befitting to a red Indian on the trail. The local telegraphic operator proved unequal to the task imposed upon him, and was superseded by a man specially imported from London, a well-oiled gentleman with a great rope of aluminium watch chain, who sat night and day clicking at the instrument—which was even for those days old-fashioned—with an assiduous dexterity almost appalling to his country colleague in the service.

The interest of the case never seemed to flag for a moment. The absolute disappearance of André Dom, and the mystery surrounding the motive for his crime, kept everybody concerned on the tenter-hooks of excitement for the first day. Then came the arrest of Potter, whose action as an accomplice—if accomplice he were—was to the full as mysterious as Dom's own. There were wild rumors afloat as to Potter's having

made away with the old Frenchman before or after the murder of George Redwood, and while these surmises were still burning, Mrs. Potter came to add fuel to the fire by her unexpected advent and by her confirmation of her husband's story with respect to his inheritance of the Reynolds farm.

The excitement reached its height, however, on the return of the long-lost John Hetheridge, who but newly arrived in England after strange and unremembered wanderings had learned the news of his old comrade's death, and half prostrate with the shock had come down to Upnor to assist in tracking the criminal, and as some already whispered, to attempt the consolation of George Redwood's widow.

Hetheridge, like the other visitors to the place, was quartered at the Black Bull, and the scene in and about the house was like that at a fair. A third of the inhabitants of the county visited the place. The lower rooms, the stable-yard, and the very street was thronged. The funeral of the murdered man was attended by crowds, and Hetheridge, solitary in a hired mourning coach, was the most conspicuous figure in the assembly. It was known that for the sake of the widow he had sworn to track George Redwood's murderer, and he had declared to the representatives of the press that he was willing, if need were, to spend the last penny of his fortune in that enterprise. A reward of five hundred pounds was offered already for the detection of the murderer in the name of a firm of solicitors in the county town, and everybody was aware that Hetheridge had inspired the announcement and deposited the money in their hands.

In the midst of the whirl of surmise which filled the public mind, no touch of suspicion fell upon him. He had been known in the village from his infancy, and not a soul dreamt of coupling him with the missing Frenchman who, unless he had been put away by Potter, was evidently the author of the tragedy.

On the day of his arrival at Upnor Hetheridge had



written a brief note to the agonized widow. It ran thus:

"MY DEAR MRS. REDWOOD:—You will be surprised to learn that I am yet alive. I returned to England only a few days ago in time to learn of the awful event which has made your life desolate. I am one of the oldest of your friends, and I am sure you have no warmer well-wisher. Let me be of service to you if I can.

"Yours faithfully, JOHN HETHERIDGE."

As a result of this note it happened that the final arrangements for the funeral fell into Hetheridge's hands. They were conducted with perfect propriety and order, and it was generally held that the unexpected aid of so clear-headed and business-like a man was a sort of Providence for Mrs. Redwood at the moment. She herself was quite incapable of taking charge of affairs, and for the first day or two after the discovery of the murder had fallen from one swoon to another until for a time her life was almost despaired of.

When once the funeral was over the public interest began to wane. The police did not even make a profession of having a clew to the whereabouts of André Dom, and the first magisterial inquiry so shook what little case there was against Potter that his discharge was looked upon as assured; and when it finally transpired that every minute of the man's time, from the hour at which Redwood had left his home until the afternoon of next day could be reasonably accounted for by credible witnesses, he was discharged.

His week's imprisonment had sobered him, but the suspicions which at first surrounded him had so confused his mind that he was incapable of any effort of memory. Even his recognition of his wife was clouded by uncertainty, and it was not until she had got him away to London that he began to be quite sure of her identity. She made repeated inquiries as to the cause of his failure to join her aboard the ship in which she sailed from Melbourne, but elicited replies so wandering and unsatisfactory that at last she gave her task up in despair, and surrendered herself to the belief that

the whole case was shrouded in an impenetrable mystery.

It was not until a month after the funeral that Hetheridge found audacity enough to face the widow in person. He had written to advise her of his coming, and found her prepared to receive him. She gave him a sad-mannered and gentle welcome. She was a mere pale shadow of her former self, thin and listless. Her one child, a sturdy, well-grown lad of six, was at her knee when Hetheridge entered the room she sat in. The touch of her hand sent a cold shudder through her visitor's frame, and he sat down confused and silent.

"It is kind of you to come here, Mr. Hetheridge," she began. "I am very glad to see so old a friend again. We had heard that you were dead."

"I had a narrow escape," he answered, clumsily, "and for months I had no knowledge or memory of what had happened. You have no news," he asked, forcing himself to the question. "That horrible Frenchman has got clean away?"

"We have no news," she answered, faintly.

"This is your boy?" he said. "Come here, my lad." The child obeyed him, and he set a hand upon his shoulder and looked into his face. His features twitched so, and he felt his expression so beyond his own control that he hid their working behind a handkerchief. "How like poor George," he murmured, huskily. "How very like him."

Mrs. Redwood had known him intimately from her earliest childhood, but had never supposed him to be so sympathetic as he seemed.

"He is very like," she answered, with a sudden burst of tears. The child ran to her and threw his arms about her neck. "He is all I have now," she sobbed, embracing him.

"You have friends, Mrs. Redwood," he answered, in a broken voice.

She said nothing in reply, but dried her eyes in silence with one clinging arm about the child. A ser-

vant maid, dressed in deep mourning, came in to say that Sir Eustace Wyncome and his sister, Mrs. Weybridge, were at the gate and would enter if Mrs. Redwood would receive them.

"You have met Sir Eustace?" Mrs. Redwood asked.

"I have seen him," Hetheridge answered, "once since my return. Don't send him away on my account, Mrs. Redwood. I can call again."

"There is no reason why you should leave us," she responded. "I will bring them in."

She went out with country courtesy to receive her visitors at the gate, and by and by came back with them. Hetheridge used the interval to compose himself. It was a great relief to have had this first interview broken in upon. He had known beforehand that the scene would be difficult, but he had not guessed that he would find it horrible.

The great man met him with a genial greeting.

"How do you do, Hetheridge? I'm glad to see you. You heard of Mr. Hetheridge's supposed death, Julia?" turning to his sister. "You know Mrs. Weybridge, of course, Hetheridge?"

"I had the honor of being known to Miss Wyncome, years ago," said Hetheridge, bowing as he spoke.

"We must have a long talk one of these days," said the baronet, laying his hand familiarly on the other's shoulder. "I should like to hear the story. It must be one the like of which one doesn't listen to every day."

"Always at your service, Sir Eustace," Hetheridge replied, bowing a second time. The position began to grow endurable. He was almost at his ease.

"They tell me," the baronet went on, with a rather blustering sociability in his tone, and talking mainly to give his hostess time to compose herself, "they tell me that you've made a mint of money. You're a millionaire or something like it, eh?"

"I haven't been unlucky in that respect, Sir Eustace," answered Hetheridge. "I'm not a millionaire, though, or anything like it. Perhaps I might be one

of these days if I went back to Melbourne. I shan't do that, though."

He glanced involuntarily toward the widow as he spoke, and the baronet with an almost imperceptible lift of the eyebrows turned the theme.

"By the way, Mrs. Redwood, my sister has brought me down here because she relies upon my powers of persuasion. Now, as a matter of fact, I haven't got any and never had any, but as for Julia she's the most persuasive woman in the world, and I've been telling her all the way that I think she had far better do her own conjuring. I think her scheme an admirable one, and I fancy that when you have heard you'll agree with her. We're all warm friends of yours, Mrs. Redwood, and I'm sure you won't think Julia intrusive in venturing to advise you."

The widow looked as if this exordium in some way pained or frightened her, but she murmured that she would be very glad to hear anything that Mrs. Weybridge or Sir Eustace might have to say.

"Remember, to begin with, Mrs. Redwood," said Sir Eustace, "that two of us are in a mind already. I think Mr. Hetheridge is likely to agree with us into the bargain. Now, Julia."

Mrs. Weybridge had been a beauty not so very long ago and was still in a matronly placid fashion a very handsome woman. She had very taking gray eyes, a pleasing voice, and a manner perhaps a thought too graciously unbending. She drew her chair near to Mrs. Redwood's, and took one of the widow's listless hands between her own gloved palms.

"You and I, Ellice," she said, "have always been the best of friends, haven't we, dear?"

"I hope so," the widow answered, rather shyly.

"You remember," pursued Mrs. Weybridge, "that I always took the fondest interest in you when you were quite a little girl."

"You were always very kind," said Mrs. Redwood.

"Always very kind."

Her heart was so full and sore that any touch of feeling brought the tears to her eyes. They glistened and ran over now, one large drop sliding down either cheek. She wiped them away with a certain simplicity and resignation which touched Sir Eustace to the heart. He rose abruptly and stared out of the window at the threadbare tracery of the leafless trees, drumming on the high window sill to feign indifference.

"I have very often thought about you and wished to have you near me," the lady continued. "I don't think—don't let anything I may say wound you, dear—I don't think you can ever expect to be very happy here again, and I think it would be far, far better if you came away and lived at Wellsted. There will be nothing there to remind you of the awful things that have happened here. Sir Eustace and I have been talking a great deal about you, and he tells me that you know very little about the practical work of the farm."

"I know a little," said the widow, "but it is not much."

"Well, don't you think it would be better to engage a bailiff to do all that, or even to let or sell the land?"

"Oh, not to sell it," cried the widow, snatching at the gloved hand which still lay on her own. "I couldn't bear to part with anything that had belonged to George."

"Well, well, dear," said Mrs. Weybridge. "Do as you please about that, but let me persuade you in this one thing. Come to Wellsted. I know the very house to suit you. Here, everything reminds you and keeps your pain alive. There, everything would be new to you but me, and you could begin to forget a little."

"You are very kind," the widow murmured, "but I shall never forget, wherever I may be."

Hetheridge's heart burned within him like a live coal at these simple words. If they were true, his crime had brought him less than nothing, for even in the little space of time that stood already between it and

him he had learned that by the murder of George Redwood he had robbed himself of the master purpose of his life. He knew now that love counted with him far less than hate. His passion for his rival's wife had not abated, but now that the stimulus of hatred was withdrawn he knew it for what it was—a sentiment essentially common-place and tame in comparison with that sovereign rage which had dominated his life for years. He would not falter in his purpose or go back from it. After his fashion he loved George Redwood's widow, but the master-spring of his life was broken, the master-motive of his will destroyed by his own hand, and whatever lay before him, whether it were defeat or success, looked poor and uneventful when set side by side with his tremendous past. What could there be left for a man who had suffered and loathed and triumphed as he had done? Nothing. The future looked well-nigh as barren as a desert.

"You will never forget, I know, dear," proceeded Mrs. Weybridge; "but among other scenes you may learn to remember with more resignation. You must know, Ellice, that you could never hope to be happy here again."

"You don't know what I feel, I dare say," Ellice answered, "but I should feel it like a crime if I wanted to be happy anywhere. I thought at first the best thing I could do would be to die, and I hoped with all my heart that grief would kill me. But then I saw that that was wicked. I have my boy to think about and care for, and I shall never have those selfish thoughts again."

"Don't you think, dear," Mrs. Weybridge urged her, "that you would be less unhappy if you were away? Sir Eustace will find you a tenant for the farm, and will see that you are well treated in that matter."

"I'll take the farm," said Hetheridge, interrupting suddenly. "I know the business pretty well. I ought to, seeing that I was brought up to it."

"You agree with us then, Hetheridge?" asked Sir Eustace, still staring out of the window.

"Heartily, Sir Eustace," Hetheridge answered, "I think the plan both kind and wise."

Upnor had a horror for him, as well it might. Where Ellice was he would be, whatever he might have to pass through in order to be near her. But he would be glad to see her far away from here, and apart from that, such mutilated hopes as were still left to him were likely to be more rapidly fulfilled, if she could be persuaded to fresh scenes. Here everything kept memory alive. In distant Wellsted there would be nothing to remind her of the past.

"Now, my dear Mrs. Redwood," said Sir Eustace, "there's an offer for you. Mr. Hetheridge will make you an excellent tenant. He'll see that the land isn't allowed to deteriorate in value, and you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that the old place is in an old friend's hands."

"There is really nothing," said Mrs. Weybridge, "to keep you here. Come with me. The mere change will do you good."

"You are the best friends I have," said the widow sorrowfully and tenderly, "I will do what you think best."

"Thank you, Mrs. Redwood," cried Sir Eustace. "I'm sure you'll try to see to it, Julia, that Mrs. Redwood has no cause to regret having followed our advice. You see, Hetheridge, Mrs. Weybridge is a sort of queen in Wellsted, and has it in her power to make things very comfortable for any one who goes there."

He renewed this theme later on, when the interview was over, and he and Hetheridge were alone.

"It stands like this, you know. My sister and I have been talking things over. She's a tactful kind of woman, with a good deal of resource, and this was what her suggestion amounted to. Mrs. Redwood is really a very superior sort of woman. She's a great deal superior in education and refinement to most yeo-

men's wives. She's a lady by nature, really and truly a lady, as many women occupying better social positions are not. A little early polish would have qualified her to shine in any sphere. Now she's got the boy to take care of, and if she's stimulated a little she'll begin in the course of a year or two to be ambitious for him. She'll find herself moving in a sphere which differs a good deal, I dare say, from this, and she may even begin to be a little ambitious for herself. Anyway, there'll be a distraction for her thoughts, a change of scene and social surroundings, and all that; and, in short, we can't help thinking that the result will be beneficial."

As the kindly Sir Eustace vented these reflections he and Hetheridge were walking through the village street together. The baronet had left his sister to drive home alone, and had elected to walk, by way of getting up an appetite for dinner.

"By the way," he said, stopping suddenly, and taking his companion by the lapel of the coat, "it must have occurred to you to wonder what earthly motive that blackguard scoundrel of a Dom could have had for killing Redwood. The old villain seems to have come from nowhere, and gone to nowhere. It's the most infernal mystery I ever heard or read of. I give you my word of honor, Hetheridge, I thought that beastly mystery over until it has made my head reel, and I can't make top or tail of it. Can you?"

Hetheridge looked him in the face steadily, and shook his head.

"The mystery is too deep for me, Sir Eustace," he replied. "You see, if poor George had gone into the world at all, folks might have found a peg to hang suspicion on. He might have made an enemy somewhere. But he lived here in Upnor all his days. And I never heard of a man who wished him ill. Except myself," he added, "and that was years ago. Poor George!"

"Ah, Hetheridge," said Sir Eustace, laying a hand



upon his shoulder, and turning to resume his walk, "you were very angry with him seven years ago or thereabouts. You were breathing out threats and slaughter against him, I remember. If you could have foreseen this end for the poor fellow, I suspect it would have cooled your anger."

"That it would, Sir Eustace," Hetheridge answered.

## CHAPTER XV.

SIR EUSTACE sat at his breakfast-table sore perplexed, and Mrs. Weybridge watched him with an eye of roguish amusement. The cause of annoyance was an epistle in the French language written in a handwriting so eccentric as to be almost illegible. Sir Eustace's knowledge of the tongue his correspondent employed was but elementary, and a far better French scholar than he might easily have found the scrawl oppressive.

"For pity's sake, Julia, do see if you can make head or tail of this," he exclaimed at last, pushing the letter across the table.

"What is it?" asked his sister.

"It's from De Ronde Lereoux. Confound him!" the baronet answered. "The beggar knows my French isn't good for much. He can write just as good English as I can when he has a mind, and he sends me this abominable scrawl to pay me out, I suppose, for having given him the trouble to write it."

"Monsieur le Viconte?" said the lady. "A very charming man, and quite capable, I'm sure, of writing a very charming letter."

"Oh, I dare say," Sir Eustace admitted, "the letter's charming enough if one could only read it."

"Let me try," said his sister.

She pored over the letter for a moment, and then looked up with a little spirit of laughter.

"Eustace," she said, "you have been airing your French."

"Airing my French?" he demanded, with an aspect half-hangdog, half-defiant. "What do you mean by that?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean," his sister retorted. "You have been writing to Monsieur le Viconte in his native language."

"Does he say so?" inquired Sir Eustace.

"Oh, dear, no," the lady answered. "He doesn't say so, but the letter does. It is written in a most admirable copy of your own style. The *pastiche* is excellent. Listen."

She read aloud, stopping to laugh from time to time.

"Je viens d'avoir reçu une lettre de vous, mon cher camarade, et je m'empresse de vous répondre. J'ai dans mon œil un homme qui est le vrai homme pour vous. Je vous l'enverrez de suite. C'est un homme très-sobre, très-discret, très-honnête, et bien expérimenté. Il a été dans mon service pour six ans. Son âge est quarante quatre, ses yeux sont gris, sa moustache est grisâtre, mais il ne se grise jamais."

"I can make all that out," said Sir Eustace, "except the last sentence. What have his eyes and his mustache to do with it?"

"They serve to herald a bad joke," the lady responded, "which is the only flaw in the whole production."

"Is that the lot of it?" Sir Eustace asked.

"That is all, except the customary French flourish at the end in which you are besought to believe that Monsieur le Viconte tenders you his most high consideration."

"Well," demanded her brother, "what is there to laugh at?"

"Nothing whatever if you choose to be grave about it. But who is the man he is sending?"

"Oh," returned Eustace, "I'm not satisfied with Lawrence's management of the vineries. I had set my heart on the first prize at the county show, and that confounded young *parvenu* of a Rogers has beaten me hollow, so I wrote to Lereoux asking him to recommend me a first-rate man."

"Well, Eustace, you have an excellent vinery, and

the Viconte may send you an excellent man, but we shall always beat you at Wellsted."

"Wellsted!" cried her brother with a jovial scorn, "Wellsted! Why, I'd beat Wellsted if I had nobody but myself to depend on. You can grow a decent Black Hamburg, but even there I beat you. And where's your——"

"Don't be quite so overwhelming, Eustace. I challenge you now. Meet us at Colchester, and we will meet you at Worcester. Off our own ground we can't compete for prizes, but we can ask for judgment."

"Done!" cried her brother. "That's a bargain. Come in. Well, what is it?"

A servant entered, and stood for a moment with a hand upon the door.

"There's a person to see you, Sir Eustace. He seems to be in charge."

"Officer with him?"

"Yes, Sir Eustace."

"Send him into the library. Some justice business, I suppose, though it's absurdly early for it. I'll see to it at once if you'll excuse me, Julia."

His sister assenting, he walked across the hall and into the library, where an officer, with that stolid air of impassivity which seems inseparable from the British policeman on duty, saluted him.

"What is your business?" the baronet inquired.

"This individual," began the officer, indicating his charge.

"I decline to be nominated as an individual," the charge broke in in foreign-sounding but fluent English. "I am a person of respectable antecedents and position."

He was a man under the middle height, with a huge gray mustache, and a face the color of a Normandy pippin. He accompanied his description of himself with vivid gestures, and looked as if, for one reason or another, his temper had passed the boiling-point.

"What is the business?" Sir Eustace asked again.

"This individual," the policeman began once more.

"Permit me to explain," said the little man, very pale beneath his brown, and his eyes sparkling with excitement. "I have the honor to address Sir Eustace Wyncomb?"

"That is my name."

"Then," pursued the little man, with an astonishing volubility of tone, "I have the further honor to present to Sir Eustace Wyncomb letters of recommendation and introduction from my honored friend and patron, the Viconte de Ronde Lereoux. Sir Eustace Wyncomb will observe"—he pressed an open letter into the baronet's hand—"that my name is André Dom; that I am of full experience in the matter in which Sir Eustace desires assistance; that my terms are four hundred francs per month, with maintenance; and that, if terms should be concluded, I am willing at once to enter on my duties."

All this the rapid, French-toned voice delivered with a wrathful emphasis, which seemed to be directed toward the stolidly impassive officer, who was just as much impressed by it as a dead tree might have been.

After the mention of the name André Dom, the baronet heard not a word. He saw at once what had happened. The name of this fiery little Frenchman had got him into mischief.

"Officer," he said, "where do you come from?"

"Dover, sir."

"You knew that a certain André Dom was charged with the wilful murder of George Redwood?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you arrested this gentleman, or he was arrested, on account of the identity of name?"

"Just so, sir."

"Well, I suppose you'll take my word for it, that this is not the man or anything like him. Wait a moment." He opened and read the letter the indignant new-comer had forced upon him. It came from his friend the Viconte and was couched in English, a trifle

too severely academic to have been written by anybody except a foreigner or a country school-master. It recommended the bearer in the highest terms. "You have made a mistake," said Sir Eustace, addressing himself to the constable. "This gentleman comes to me recommended by a French nobleman, an intimate friend of mine. What on earth," he asked, "made even the police suppose that a man who had committed a murder here would be carrying about a letter of introduction to me?"

"The inspector thought," said the policeman, "that he might carry the letter to evade suspicion."

"And go about," said Sir Eustace, "under his own name for the same purpose! I presume you have some sort of business somewhere. You may see to it."

The officer withdrew, surrendering his prey with a reluctant eye.

"Well, Monsieur Dom," said Sir Eustace, when they were alone. "My friend speaks very highly of your capacity, and if your terms are as satisfactory as your testimonials I shall be happy to secure your services."

Monsieur Dom repeated the statement of his terms, and Sir Eustace closed with him.

"You'd like to see the vineries at once, I dare say," and Dom assenting Sir Eustace summoned his sister, and the three set out together. The baronet on the way relating the curious adventure by which Dom's arrival had been marked. "Is yours a common name?" he asked.

"It is not uncommon," the Frenchman responded. "I have met many who bear it, though never with my own *prenom*."

"You may find the name a little unpopular at first," his employer said, laughingly, "but you may live that down."

"I will try to hope so, Sir Eustace," the little man answered.

They came to the vineries, a trio of enthusiasts, and

the new arrival left them in no doubt as to his theoretical acquaintance with his duties. He continued to please both Sir Eustace and his sister, and after an hour's talk was formally installed.

The vineries were extensive, and it was evident to the expert's accustomed eye that they had not only been mismanaged but neglected. He found his hands full for two or three weeks, and during that time saw next to nothing of his new environment. When the first rush of work was over, however, he found time to make himself acquainted with the village and its inhabitants, and since he turned out to be of a singularly jovial, sunny, and friendly disposition he found himself in a very little time in agreeable relations with the best people of the place.

He found that the staple of the village conversation was even now supplied by the details of the mysterious murder of George Redwood, and by the unexpected and astonishing return of one, John Hetheridge, who had been supposed long ago to have perished in the Australian bush. Now it happened that Monsieur Dom had been acquainted with a person of that name, who to his own belief had come to an end in a like manner, and he experienced a natural interest in the man long before he saw him. He made close inquiries about John Hetheridge's aspect, and the answers he had received confirmed his first belief. The ignorance of the villagers with respect to the locality in which Hetheridge had been lost was complete. Not one of them could tell him so much as the name of the colony, but the name and the date both coincided, and he was pretty sure that the returned John Hetheridge could be none other than his old employer.

He was passing one day in front of Mrs. Redwood's house of mourning, and paused to look at the operations at that instant going on there. The garden was littered with articles of furniture, bound in straw. A huge furniture van stood before the gate, and two men were staggering along the path bearing a high cottage

piano between them. It was evident that Mrs. Redwood was on the move, and was making that departure from the scene of her life's tragedy which he knew from common gossip she had had in contemplation these two months past. The fact that a man bearing his own name had been the author of the tragedy gave an interest to it which it would not otherwise have possessed for him, and he was speculating as to who this mysterious undiscoverable namesake of his might have been, when a horse's foot-fall on the frost-hardened road reached his ear and he turned round to face John Hetheridge.

"Aha," he cried, running forward to meet him. "I had learned that you were not dead after all. It is a strange chance that throws us together again. You shall allow me, Mr. Hetheridge, to congratulate you upon your escape."

At the sound of his first greeting, Hetheridge started violently in his saddle, stared with dilating eyes and then changed color. He recovered himself in a moment, and leaning over the horse's neck stretched out a hand which the Frenchman grasped warmly.

"How are you, Mr. Dom?" he asked. "When I saw you first I took you for a ghost. I suppose," he added with a clumsy laugh, "you noticed how you startled me at first. The truth is, that ever since that adventure in the bush and the long illness that came after it, I've been as nervous as a cat."

"No wonder," said Monsieur Dom, sympathetically, "I am myself experienced. I should know. I was bushed for three days. There is nothing more horrible. Ah, my dear sir, I know, I know."

Hetheridge dismounted and tethered his horse to the railings.

"I have business here," he said, "and I must go in for a little time, but I mustn't forget to ask what brings you here?"

"I," returned Dom, "am the employee of Sir Eustace



Wyncomb. I have care of his vinery. It is pleasant. It will not be hard work. I shall grow a grape, the finest in the world. I could make from it a wine which the Count of Monte Cristo could not afford to drink. It would cost him fifty pounds. It is you English for spending money on your elegant luxuries. Eh?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Hetheridge. "We'll meet again; I'm stopping at the Black Bull. If you care to look in there in an hour's time you'll find me."

He had no liking or affection for the man. Save for himself and Ellice Redwood, he had no liking or affection for anybody. The sudden appearance of the man whose name he had adopted filled his mind with crawling and insinuating fears. The undetected criminal is always a terror to himself. He starts at shadows and sees in every bush an officer. The phantom hand hovers above his shoulder whether he sleep or wake, and at any second, to his fancy, the phantom may grow into sudden flesh and bone, and fall with the inexorable fiat of the law. Unspoken words haunt the eaves of expectation. "You are my prisoner." The words wait always on the threshold of the ear. They tingle in every pulse. The wide air holds them meshed in silence and they are always ready to escape. Hetheridge had begun to learn already that a murderer's bitterest penalty is to go scot-free. The mere denunciation, trial and hanging of the common villain would have been mercy compared to the fate which his own devilish astuteness had adjoined him.

He had no liking or affection for the man and yet he must needs meet him and be friendly with him, if only out of superstition. He had stolen his name—the name of the first Frenchman with whom he had ever been on anything like familiar terms, and here, as if by a miracle, was the legitimate bearer of it, carrying in his very presence an unconscious challenge and reproach.

Monsieur Dom dropped in at the Black Bull, the flavor of whose excellent cup of cognac he was already acquainted with, and there awaited Hetheridge's ar-

rival. The landlord of the Bull was always ready for a chat, and Dom, after the manner of his nation, was inclined to be loquacious about things which were of no special moment, though—still like his nation—he could be secretive enough, when he chose.

“I have met your Meestare Hetheridge,” said Dom. “He is, as I guessed he would be, the gentleman I knew. It was to me he spoke his last word before riding away to get lost in the bush. Life is a curious thing, that brings us two again together after so long time and so far away.”

“Yes,” the landlord assented. “It’s a bit queer altogether, Mr. Dom. It’s a very odd thing that two Frenchmen bearing the same name should come into a little place like this. One right on top one of another. I wonder where that bloodthirsty old party is. You never saw anybody as looked less likely to commit a murder. A mild-spoken, quiet-mannered, queer old chap as ever you’d wish to see. Bent double he was, too, pretty nigh, with his old fists a quavering on his walk-in’ stick. He looked as if he couldn’t hurt a child, even if he’d wanted to. Couldn’t hardly speak a word of English. There was ’ardly anybody, save Mr. Redwood, as could understand him when he talked. I suppose the thing will stop a mystery now since it’s gone so far. But the thing as’ll allas puzzle me is what the old boy done it for. The two was always friendly in a sort o’ way. There was no notion about robbery. Poor Mr. Redwood’s watch and chain, and his pocket-book, with five-and-thirty pounds in it, in Bank of England notes, and the money in his pockets—why, they was all there to a halfpenny.”

Monsieur Dom sipped his cognac and pulled reflectively at his pipe of sweet caporal..

“Yes,” he said. “It is strange. It is very strange.”

He had fallen into an odd mood, and he sat with a curious expectation, a sense he could not have defined, though it had been to save his life. It was as if a man should sit in a twilight chamber with almost a surety

that by and by a door should open and show him some unheard-of thing.

The landlord, pleased with a listener, went on.

"There's the murder—that's a queer thing. There's that old Frenchman comin' from nobody knows where, to do it, and goin' nobody knows where, when it's done—and that's a queer thing. There's you, as different from the man as light from dark, comin' in among us, and bringing his name back again. And then as queer as any of 'em, here's Mr. Redwood's old friend, reckoned to be dead this two years, turning up two days after the murder like a ghost. I'm —," said the landlord, "if ever I heard of such a lot of queer things together in all my life."

"Mr. Hetheridge," asked Dom, "was the friend of the man who was killed?"

"Brought up together," the landlord answered. "Pretty much like brothers, till they was two or three and twenty. They had a bit of a tiff later on about the young lady poor Mr. Redwood married. They both wanted her. The other man, he went out to Australia."

"And was lost for two years," said Dom. "That is a long time to be lost for."

"Yes," said the landlord, frothing out a mug of beer for himself, "it's a longish time, but when you come to think about it it's natural enough. The poor man seems to have got a sunstroke in the wilds out there. I've heard him say he didn't remember even his own name when he got into his right mind again."

There was the open door! But standing in the light it gave or seemed to give was an imagination so monstrous, so unfounded, so gratuitously impossible and absurd, that Monsieur Dom waved it imperatively on one side and declined to look at it.

"Could not remember his own name," said the landlord.

"And so took mine!"

The words sprang into Dom's mind, and were almost

at his lips before he saw how wild they would have sounded if spoken, how mad they seemed even to his own fancy.

This Hetheridge had known him; André Dom had vanished for two years from the sight of the world, had had reason to hate Redwood, had come to the scene of the murder within two days of its perpetration. Well, what was there in all that? The root of the ridiculous fancy, of which it would be wise to breathe no word.

For the next ten minutes the landlord had the talk entirely to himself. Monsieur Dom smoked assiduously, stroking his huge mustache, and grunting yes or no at random. At the end of that time Hetheridge entered, and the Frenchman awaking from his *réverie* plunged into talk with him.

"Our good friend the patron," he said, "has been telling me that you suffered from a sunstroke from your wanderings in the bush."

"Yes," said Hetheridge with averted face. "You'd have thought it too late in the year for that, wouldn't you? But I remember one or two blazing days."

Was that fancy, the little *Vigneron* asked himself, or was it humbug? He remembered the long and painful search for the missing man, and he recalled it minutely, detail by detail. Hot weather for the season of the year undoubtedly, but hot enough for sunstroke? Possibly, he thought at last. There was no knowing precisely what might happen to a man weakened by want and exposure.

He decided that he suspected nothing. That as an honorable and clean-minded man, he had no right to suspect anything. The fancy which had attacked him was no better than an intrusive madness. He would let it go.

But all the same it clung.

## CHAPTER XVI.

SAM POTTER was domiciled in London in the highly respectable boarding-house off the Gray's Inn Road. The little Matilda was in Wellsted in care of her infant charge there until such time as the Reverend Jordan Farrell should secure a successor for her. Sam had been formally introduced to the lawyers who had charge of his affairs, and they were taking out letters of administration for him. Nothing but the routine business had to be gone through, and Sam, in the hands of the lawyers, was docile and did as he was commanded so that things went smoothly, and in a fortnight he was in full possession of his own.

In the mean time he had afforded a dreadful exercise to Matilda's maiden aunt. He was perfectly quiet, and so far as the good lady knew, was strictly virtuous and sober. But he had camping-out habits which were hard to bear. He had a rooted repugnance against going to bed, for instance, and slept upon the bedroom floor in his boots. He smoked the strongest kind of plug tobacco in the foulest old clay in the world, and the whole house reaped the fumes of his perpetual incense. His table manners were almost barbarous. In moments of extorted respect he called his landlady Boss, but in ordinary converse addressed her as Matey.

He gave away specimens and small nuggets with a lavish hand, and he supplied the children of the neighborhood so freely with small, cheap drums and painted wooden trumpets that the hitherto quiet street became a pandemonium. The infantry of the district skirmished about the area railings with shrieks of "Sam," and were dispersed by the heavier metal of the household brigade, only to return unconquerable as flies.

On Sam's appearance he was hailed with clamors of delight and expectation. He held scrambles for coppers and sweet stuff of all sorts, and generally brought the street he lived in to such a stage of disrepute that all its decent householders were willing to enter into a league against him.

A deputation waited on Miss Thoms and represented the case strongly. The excellent lady promised to take the bull by the horns, and implemented her promise as the Scotch lawyers say, no later than that afternoon.

"I am sorry to tell you, Mr. Potter," she began, "that a highly respectable lodger of mine is coming up from the country to-morrow, and that I shall want your room for her."

"All right, matey," Sam returned. "Any room will do for me."

"I regret," Miss Thoms responded, "that I have no other room to place at your disposal."

"Well," said the accommodating Sam, "I can get a strip or two of weather-board, and a strip o' canvas. Then a hammer and a handful o' nails, and I can fix myself up in the back yard as right as ninepence."

At this evidence of savagery, Miss Thoms, though a resolute and courageous woman, displayed symptoms of faintness so pronounced, as to alarm her guest.

"You are not in the jungle now, Mr. Potter, but in a respectable house in London. What you propose might be suitable for Greenland's icy mountains or India's coral strand, but we can endure no such proceedings in the neighborhood of the Gray's Inn Road."

"All right, matey," said Sam placidly, unaware of his countless offences against propriety. "Fix it how you like it. I can have a shake-down on the floor here, or in the kitchen. There's a lot of black beetles in the kitchen. I know that because I've seen 'em, but after snakes, they won't count for much, will they, matey?"

"None of the expedients you propose, Mr. Potter,"

returned the lady of the house, with extremest frozen dignity, "are at all likely to be adopted here."

"Good iron," returned the inexorably amiable Sam. "Just put me where you like. One place is pretty much the same to me as another. When a bloke's humped his bluey all over the Australias from Auckland to the Bluff and Carpenteria to Melbourne, for a matter of fifteen year, why don't you see he gets manured to things. Put me anywhere, boss. I shall be contented."

"There is no room for you in the house, Mr. Potter," the old lady insisted.

"Oh, I see," said Sam, at last enlightened. "You want to fire me out? All right. Anything for a quiet life. But look here, matey, where am I to go to? I don't know anybody in the township."

"You had better go to Wellsted and join my niece Matilda. Your things are packed already, and if you start at once you may catch a train for Colchester at the Eastern Counties Railway station. One of the maids shall call you a four-wheeler."

Being thus summarily disposed of, there was nothing for it but to obey orders. Sam's luggage was heaped upon it, and he was driven away, obstinately good-humored to the last, and pursued out of sight by a shrieking mob of infant savagery.

Matilda was greatly surprised to receive a message from her husband late at night to the effect that he had put up at the local hotel, and should expect to see her in the morning. She passed a night of some anxiety, and at an early hour started out in search of Sam, whom she found in the back yard of the hotel making his toilet at the pump, splashing like a water fowl and hissing as if had been red-hot. Sam explained the meaning of his presence there, and submitted meekly to be told that his dismissal was the result of his own heathen habits.

"Well, my dear," he said placably, "I'm better off in a pub. than I am in that kind o' dandy hash-house.

I'm more used to it, and in a pub. nobody takes any notice of my ways."

"Promise me you won't drink, Sam," his wife besought him.

"Well, I won't drink," Sam answered. "Look here; if I've got a big check about me I'm bound to knock it down sooner or later. You take the whole thundering swag, 'Tilda, and give me a couple of dollars a day. That'll pay for the shake-down and the tucker, and I shan't have a chance to go round shouting drinks for anybody."

To this sensible programme Matilda at once acceded. Sam handed over the whole of his money to his wife, and paying his bill daily with a scrupulous regularity, made cold tea his sole beverage, and kept out of the way of temptation.

When 'Tilda walked out with her young charge morning and afternoon she found Sam awaiting her punctual as in the days of courtship. They had many rambles together, and conversed on many topics, but nothing but failure encountered the little woman's attempts to elicit the narrative of Sam's days of prolonged absence.

"It's no use, 'Tilda," Sam would say. "I can't get back at it. Directly I begin to think about it my head begins to spin and my brains fly off at the handle."

"I'm afraid," Tilda answered on one occasion, "that you did something you're ashamed to let me know."

"Not me," said Sam; "no fear. There's somebody 'as had something to do with it. I can't tell who it is, but it's always as if he was close by to me. He's always there, and I can't see him. I get that mad sometimes my head goes all to nothing. The more I try the further off it seems."

But for this strange lapse of memory, Sam was as sure as ever he had been, and after a time, when Matilda had ceased to interrogate him, he did his best to put all thoughts of his misfortune on one side. He became a decided popular favorite in Wellsted, and



told interminable yarns over his cold tea at the public-house at which he had taken up his residence, insomuch that crowds assembled in the tap-room to hear the traveller's stories. He could tell from his own recollection of the first great gold rush to Ballarat and the fight at the Eureka Stockade. He could tell how, with his own eyes, he had seen a gloomy forest banished, and great city erected, as if by magic, on the space where it had stood. He painted scenes of desert privation and of wild orgie, and in his own rough and homely language related a thousand epic circumstances.

In due time, Mrs. Jordan Farrell having found a successor for Matilda, the little woman was free to return to her husband. In the course of their rambles with the child she and Sam had marked a six-roomed cottage, standing in the midst of an inviting and well-ordered little plot of ground, and decided between them that it would be a rather agreeable thing to have the perils of housekeeping and live there. Inquiries proved that the cottage might be had on a seven-years' lease at a moderate rental. The place was taken and furnished, and the pair settled down with a very small servant-girl as the sole complement of the household. Sam found congenial employment in the garden, where he pruned and raked and hoed and planted and weeded with a constant ardor, whilst Matilda and the small maid between them kept the house painfully neat and polished.

They had been housekeeping for half a year or thereabouts when they decided on a question of great moment to this history. "I have kept my lips closed, Sam," said Tilda, "up till now; but the little thing will be growing up to an understanding age, and I want to know whether it would be right to tell her who she really is or to keep dark about it?"

Sam revolved the matter in his mind in silence, slowly puffing at his pipe meanwhile.

"Well, my dear," he asked at last, "what do you think?"

"No, Sam," urged Matilda, "I want to know what you think."

"Well, you see, Matilda," Sam responded, "it's like this. I never quite know what I do think until I know what you think. Which," he added idly, "is rhyme as well as reason."

"Well, then, Sam," said Matilda, "I think it best to say nothing at all. She's Bob Martin's little girl in point of fact, as I've heard you say a thousand times. Now her father had no' got anything to leave her, had he?"

"Not so much as an old boot," Sam answered.

"Nor," pursued Matilda, "his father's kith and kin?"

"His old folks," Sam responded, "is dead this ten years. His sister married a ship's mate and has gone the Lord knows where. There's nobody to claim the kid and nobody to take care of her except me. I'm her natural guardian."

"She's likely to be a great deal better off without you," said Mrs. Potter, decisively, "and it's too late to meddle with her now. I'm speaking for the child's good, Sam. It's getting to be a good deal over three years since I first had to do with her, and it stands to reason I've got fond of her. She's got a name of her own, or at least she's got a name she's known by. Mr. Hetheridge left her all his money once, and he's likely to do as much again, for I don't suppose he'll ever marry. She's being taken thorough good care of, and I think we'd better make up our minds once for all to keep a quiet tongue about it. She'll grow up to a lady where she is being took excellent good care of, else urge it upon you, I never would, Sam, and that you may put your Bible word to."

"Very well, Matilda," Sam returned. "That being your opinion it's mine likewise. I shan't say anything."

The phenomena of mental disease are often obscure and strange. The lost figure after which Potter's memory strayed in fruitless endeavor had been in his

thoughts a hundred times, and he had never recognized it. In a rambling and half-intelligible way he had told his tale to Redwood, and at that time he had known quite clearly who it was that had dealt him that almost fatal blow in Hetheridge's house in Melbourne. Now, the memory of that terrible episode seemed altogether erased from his mind. The pictures of it had faded into nothingness. Even the mention of Hetheridge's name brought no hint to his intelligence. In his talks about the child with his wife, he often heard the name and often used it. His mind seemed clear in respect to all his dealings with Hetheridge, except one. To revive the memory of that night he needed a remembrance of another sort, and in due time it came.

Mrs. Redwood and her boy had long since settled in Wellsted, under the august shelter of Mrs. Weybridge's wing. The widow had taken, under her patroness' advice, a handsome little house, not far from Weybridge Hall. Her story had followed her, of course, but it awoke and could awake no sentiment but one of pity, and she was never molested by a hint of it. She was still young and pretty and was obviously well to do, whilst the countenance of Mrs. Weybridge gave her a better social position than ever she could have aspired to in the neighborhood of Upnor, and there were not a few gentlemen of early middle age in that part of the country who were inclined to think that she might make an agreeable life companion. She was altogether unconscious of these fancies, and would have looked on the mere suggestion of a second marriage as something very like a blasphemy. Hetheridge visited her now and then at considerable intervals, but never imperilled his cause by a hint of the hope that prompted him. He had waited years for revenge, and he could wait as long, and at least as patiently for love. He found life a weary business and subdued himself to it with a fatigued resignation. He began to see—he had long ago begun to see that from the

most purely selfish point of view the murder of George Redwood was a blunder. It had taken all the salt and spice out of the dish of life and had left the mess flavorless. His desire for Ellice Redwood, though it was still his strongest sentiment, was a poor thing in comparison with what it had been whilst his detestation of her living husband lent it life and force. He suffered, too, from the companionship of horrors whose presence it was difficult to endure. That inspiration of nervous hate which had so long supported him was only possible to a man on whom the nerves could take great and terrible revenges. Conscience, or what is popularly known as conscience, left him unassailed, but his outraged nerves called into being whole battalions of invisible enemies to his peace. He had gone back to business, and was up to the eyes in affairs of great importance. Over and over again he courted times when it seemed that a week might make or break him; and these experiences, with the mental strain they brought, afforded him the only trustworthy bulwark he had against the phantom host. The very good fortune which followed all his business enterprises terrified whilst it enriched him. No man could long be as lucky as himself with impunity. Some stroke of misfortune would surely fall upon him and atone for everything.

The constant gambling of his business life, the wine he drank to drown his fears, the ceaseless torment of his nervous tremors, combined to wear him down until he seemed scarcely more than skin and bone.

It was necessary for him sometimes to entertain men with whom he did business, and he had at first thought of taking a large house in one of the least expensive of the great western squares. He had even visited the house he had in mind, and had obtained estimates for furnishing it, when the dread of its empty loneliness got hold of him and drove him from the project. He found handsome lodgings, and gave his dinners, when it was necessary to give them, at a hotel.

The multitude of his affairs rendered it impossible for him to visit Wellsted often, but he would occasionally run down from Saturday till Monday, and would sometimes call on Mrs. Redwood for an hour or two on the Sunday afternoon. He was never happy in her presence, or contented in his anticipation of his visit or in his memory of it. They made a deeper gloom in the night of life, and yet he sought them.

Wellsted is not a large place, but it had room enough in it even at that time for a good many different social circles. Mrs. Redwood lived on the fringe of the loftiest, and Sam Potter and his wife in the middle of a ring simply and purely bourgeois.

Sam, who had been arrested for the murder of the lady's husband, could hardly fail to know of her history and whereabouts, but Mrs. Redwood remained ignorant of his neighborhood.

More than a year had gone by since the widow's removal from Upnor. It was winter-time, and there were two or three inches of snow upon the ground. Hetheridge had paid one of his Sunday visits, had said his good-bys, and was in the act of returning to his hotel. The Sabbath stillness was intensified by the snow. His own footsteps were almost inaudible to him as he walked down the long and winding path which led from the house to the gateway. Twice he paused and looked back, saw the warm light in the windows of the room he had just quitted. The landscape without looked old and bare, and the sky reflected the snow-light faintly, and objects a score of yards away took already fantastic and uncertain forms. The gate was wide open, and, as he reached it, he turned a third time to look at the light which shone out at the windows, broken into many shooting rays by the intervening branches of the leafless trees. The chill of coming enemy, the dull and deathly gray of sky and landscape, and the all-pervading hush and sense of loneliness combined to make the apartment he had so recently left seem warmer and more homelike

than it had been in reality. He stood looking toward it for a full minute filled with an impotent wrathful yearning. He tore himself away with a groan of impatience, and swinging rapidly through the gateway and into the road, came into rough contact with a stalwart figure at the corner.

"Where are you going to, you stupid yokel?" he began.

He got no further, for, to his fear and amazement, a pair of strong hands clutched him by the throat, and so struck him that his hat flew into the horse road, and his teeth seemed to chatter in his head. At first the shock and astonishment of this unlooked-for assault deprived him of all power of observation, but as his wits began to work, and he struggled to escape the grasp which held him; he saw that his assailant was no other than Sam Potter.

"Oh, you can wriggle," said his adversary, still shaking him, "but I've got you safe this time. You murderer! you cold-blooded wicked murderer! You come along o' me to the police. I've got you by the wool, matey. You'd better be quiet and come along peaceable. If you don't I'll shake the life out of you."

This statement made, Sam took one brawny grip of shirt, waistcoat, coat, and overcoat, half throttling his captive, and marching into the road with him, compelled him to stoop for his hat. When Hetheridge in a half-dazed condition of mind had obeyed him, and had put the hat on, his captor gave it a savagely humorous tap on the crown and drove it over his ears.

"Now," he said, "you'll go knocking innocent men on the head again, won't you? No. I can answer that question for you, matey, not much you won't. I'm going to have you took care of for the rest of your natural life, I am. You come along o' me to the watch-house."

Hetheridge was weaponless, and Potter's prodigious strength gave him an advantage against which it was vain to struggle.

"You madman," he said, "what do you mean? Who are you? I never saw you in my life before."

"Oh, yes you did," said Potter jeeringly. "Your name's John Hetheridge, and mine's Sam Potter. We've met on the other side of the world, we have. You tried to murder me in your own house in Melbourne. You knocked me on the head and left me senseless, you wicked murderer. I can prove it all agen you. I'll swear to every word of it."

He tightened his grasp and dragged Hetheridge along the road, too excited at first to see that the grasp he kept upon him was actually imperilling his life. When he discovered this he changed his hold, and sustaining his captive in an upright posture whilst he recovered breath, he triumphed over him.

"You've waited a long time for this, haven't you, matey? So have I. I wonder how often I've tried to remember who it was that struck me that wicked blow. I might never ha' found it out at all if you hadn't run agen me, but you see I got it in a flash. Here, I ain't goin' to waste time talking to you, come along."

He dragged his prisoner on again. The dusk was fast falling, and as chance had it, there was not a soul abroad.

The police office stood in a court-yard off the main street of the town, and almost at the point where the town and country met. Potter thrusting Hetheridge before him, hustled his man into the outer room of the station. An officer, who was lounging sleepily by the fire, rose at the noise of their entrance.

"What's this?" he demanded.

"Here he is," said Potter, "I've got him. After all these years I've got him."

"Well," inquired the officer, whose position afforded him an occasional opportunity for the vent of a chastened humor, "what are you going to do with him now you have got him?"

Sam passed an uncertain hand across his forehead

and looked from the prisoner to the policeman and back again, but said nothing.

"The man's mad," said Hetheridge, "mad or drunk. He fell upon me in the street just now and half choked me."

"Come now," exclaimed the officer, turning severely round on Potter. "You've got to explain all this, you now."

Sam said not a word. The excitement had been too much for him and he had forgotten everything.



## CHAPTER XVII.

HETHERIDGE knew not what to make of his accuser's silence.

"Come," said the officer. "What's the meaning of it? You make an assault on this gentleman and hustle him in here. You've got to explain yourself, you know."

Still Sam said not a word. He passed his hands across his eyes again and looked from one to the other in hopeless bewilderment. His late prisoner began to put two and two together. Potter had confessed to having tried often and vainly to remember whose hand had struck him. The man's mind was obviously unhinged and it was plain to see that his memory had again deserted him.

"Do you know this fellow at all?" Hetheridge asked the officer.

"Why, yes sir," the man returned. "I know him. I don't know anything against him. He's a man of private means, and he's got a respectable house in the Pleasaunce. I think," he added confidently, "if you ask me, he's been drinking."

"I think he's mad," said Hetheridge, growing moment by moment more assured. "You see how he has served me, officer?"

His shirt-collar was torn open, his scarf was a wreck, a pair of buttons were missing from his overcoat, and on his throat the purple impress of Sam Potter's knuckles was plainly visible.

"I see, sir," the officer answered, sympathetically. Then turning to Potter—"Now are you going to say anything or are you not?"

Potter's bewilderment was complete and he stood like a man in a dream.

"Do you give the man in charge, sir?" the officer asked, appealing to Hetheridge.

"Certainly I do. If the man's mad he must be taken care of. If he's drunk he needs to be taught a lesson."

"I must trouble you for your name and address, sir," said the officer, and the brief necessary formalities having been complied with, Hetheridge went his way leaving his late captor, captive.

The more he reflected upon the incident the more he was inclined to think that on the whole it was one concerning which he might congratulate himself. It would certainly have been better to have escaped Potter altogether, but since the man was here an encounter between them could hardly have resulted more favorably. Even supposing Potter to recover his memory of events, the fact of his violence and his silence made it easy to suggest that his charge was no more than a madman's dream. In any case Hetheridge concluded it was entirely unsupported by evidence. To anybody who did not know the facts of the case, Potter's conduct must look absolutely crazy. An accusation following on so strange a proceeding might be brushed aside as the babble of an idiot, or the raving of a madman.

"You'd better come this way, my friend," said the officer, when he and Sam were left to themselves. He took down a bunch of keys from the wall and leisurely motioned his prisoner to a doorway leading to the cells.

Sam in his dazed state would have obeyed anybody in almost anything, but before he had made a forward step a gentleman walked briskly through the doorway which had just been indicated.

"That's all right, Roberts," he said. "The man's safe enough now, and will do very nicely till the morning. When I first saw him I thought he was on the way to kingdom come. As complete a case of al-

coholic poisoning as ever I saw in my life. Hullo, my man, what's the matter with you?"

Sam, with his feet planted apart and with his hands thrust into the pockets of his pilot-cloth jacket, was swaying round and round in a fashion which threatened an immediate fall. The gentleman took him by the lapel of his coat to steady him and looked into his eyes with grave inquiry. The swaying motion ceased, but Sam stared right before him, seeing nothing and thinking nothing.

"Where did you pick up this fellow, Roberts?"

"Why, it's rather a queer affair, sir," said the policeman. "He brought himself here. You know Mr. Hetheridge, sir?" The doctor nodded. "This man brought him by the collar about ten minutes back—rushed him in as if he was trundling a wheelbarrow. I thought he was going to give him in charge, but he hasn't opened his lips to say a word, good, bad or indifferent. Looks a bit queer, don't he, sir?"

"Yes," the doctor assented. "He looks a bit queer. Perhaps more than a bit queer. Sit down on this bench, my man. There you are. Now give me a chair, Roberts."

"Think he's been drinking, sir?" the official asked.

"Sure he hasn't," said the Doctor. "Not a sign of drink about him. I know the man by sight. Who is he?"

"Name of Potter, Samuel Potter. Has a house in the Pleasaunce."

"Ah, yes, I know him now. Look here, Potter, wake up a bit."

Sam, being thus appealed to, made a half-mechanical effort to collect himself, and looked his interlocutor in the face.

"You've had a shock, haven't you, Potter? Now what was it? Don't remember? You've been exciting yourself. You've been flying into a passion. Now that isn't good for us, is it, Potter? This man's had a sunstroke, or a knock on the head, and excitement

spills him. He's clean spilt now. There'll be probably no making anything out of him till to-morrow."

"Well, sir," said the official, facetiously, "I'll take care of him till then."

"I rather think you'd better not," the doctor answered. "His temperature is too low already. The man's shivering. A night in the cells will do him no good. Give him a seat by the fire, and I'll go over and see Mr. Weybridge. Send somebody down to his wife and tell her to come up to the hall at once. She can find bail for him. The man will be best at home."

Poor Matilda was very frightened to learn that, for the second time in their married life, the unfortunate Sam was in the hands of the police. The teapot, under its comfortable cozy, already simmered on the table. The muffins were in the fender under a metal cover, and everything was in waiting for the evening meal. The palpitating little woman deserted all, and snatching up shawl and bonnet, rushed out into the snow-lit night, arranging her bows and adjusting her shawl with trembling fingers as she ran. The instructions left by the messenger were that she should proceed immediately to the hall; and it was fortunate for her that she had not far to go. Even as it was she arrived in a state of breathless agitation, and for a little while was as useless as Sam himself would have been at that moment. Mr. Weybridge, acting on the doctor's statement, made no difficulty about admitting Potter to bail on his own recognizance; and Sam being sent for, was with some little trouble induced to sign his name, and so released.

Matilda wept over him when she had him once more in her own charge, and would have clamored at him with questions if the doctor had not intervened.

"My dear lady," said the medico. "If you don't let this unlucky husband of yours alone, you may have to send him to an asylum. Don't plague him with questions to-night. Give him a quiet cup of tea, and let him get to bed. The more sleep he can get be-

tween now and to-morrow morning, the better it will be for him. I'll come in and do the questioning in the morning."

Under ordinary circumstances Matilda would have resented this interference with her domestic rights, but in her solicitude for Sam she submitted with humility. She burned with curiosity half the night, but suppressed her natural cravings with heroism and forbore to ask a single question.

In the morning Sam was as queer as ever, and whilst he and Matilda sat unbusiness-like at the breakfast-table, the one making a mere pretence of eating and the other not even pretending, the little maid brought in the name of Dr. Hope. Matilda herself arose to receive the visitor, and, meeting the doctor in the hall, answered his first inquiries with a woful shake of the head.

"Let us have a look at him," said the Doctor, cheerily; and, entering the room in which breakfast was laid, he put a friendly hand on Sam's broad back. "And how are we this morning?"

Sam looked at him with inexpressive eyes and said nothing. The doctor for a mere instant looked disconcerted, and Matilda, whose anxieties quickened her perceptions, saw him lift his eyebrows with an expression that seemed to betoken both surprise and disappointment. He smoothed his features in an instant, and, patting Sam soothingly on the shoulder, urged him to speak.

"Come, old fellow, can't you find your tongue? How are you?"

Still Sam had nothing to say for himself, and Matilda began to cry.

"Now, my dear madam," said the Doctor, "we must have no giving way. We must have patience, and we must have courage. Nobody can work in the dark, you know, and you must tell me as much as you can about your husband. It's plainly to be seen that he has lived a great deal abroad. A man doesn't get

a complexion like his in England. Now did you ever hear of him ever having sunstroke?"

"No, sir," sobbed Matilda. "Never."

"Do you know," asked the Doctor, "of his having received at any time a wound on the head from a fall or a blow, or anything of that kind?"

"He's never been able to tell exactly how it happened," 'Tilda answered, "but he's mentioned often that his head was hurt in Australia."

"Have you ever seen him like this before?"

"Never till yesterday."

"And how long have you been married?"

"About three years, sir."

"Well now, tell me. Was this injury to the head, whatever it may have been, received before or after your marriage?"

"After," returned Matilda. "We've talked about it a good deal, and I've tried to get to the bottom of it often, but it always seemed to mither him, and so lately I haven't talked about it much. I can't help thinking that it must have happened the night that I left Melbourne."

"How long ago?"

"We'd been married about two months," said Matilda; "and Sam had money coming to him in England. We made up our minds to come here, and I went aboard the ship. Sam was to have been there that night two or three hours before we sailed, but he didn't come, and I never had word of him for two years."

The conversation had been carried on in an ordinary tone at his very elbow, but Sam paid no heed to the speakers. He had drawn out of his pocket a flat plug of tobacco and a clasp-knife, and now sat shredding the tobacco into coarse fragments with an aspect almost mechanical.

"And how," asked the Doctor, with an observant sidelong glance at him, "did he explain his absence?"

"He never could," returned Matilda, with a gush of

tears. "I've never been able to understand it to this day. His poor head's been knocked about dreadfully. You can feel that for yourself."

The doctor, rising and standing over his patient, passed his dexterous fingers, at once firm and light about Potter's head, and paused suddenly with an in-drawn whistling breath.

"That was a smash," he said, "and no mistake," and so sat down again. "Go on," he said, nodding to Matilda.

"That's all I know," she answered.

"Perhaps not quite all. We shall see. Had your husband any reason for staying on shore whilst you went on board ship? Try to remember that."

"Oh, yes," Matilda answered, readily. "He went to my old place to fetch my boxes. I've thought sometimes he might have met with robbers in the house. You see, sir, the place was empty. Mr. Hetheridge was believed to be dead at that time. He was lost in the bush."

"Mr. Hetheridge?" the Doctor asked. "Was that the man your husband is charged with assaulting?"

"It's the same gentleman, sir," said Matilda.

"M'm," said the Doctor, thoughtfully. "Well, Mrs. Potter, for the present, there's nothing for it but to keep your husband quite tranquil. He mustn't be bothered in any way, but if you can rouse him a little and find something to occupy him, it will do him good. Only it must be done with the greatest gentleness. Don't startle him, and don't let him be worried."

He made certain necessary inquiries as to the physical condition of his patient, wrote out the inevitable prescription, and took his leave, revolving the whole business in his mind. Here again was suspicion dogging Hetheridge's murderous footsteps with nothing but itself to feed on. It was as plainly to be seen as the sun at mid-day, that Potter's encounter with Hetheridge had so far excited him as to throw his disturbed mind nearly off its balance, and his action in dragging

Hetheridge to the police station indicated that he had, or fancied that he had, a criminal charge to prefer against him. What more likely than a charge of murderous assault, and—in the same breath—what less likely?

The Petty Session at Wellsted were held weekly, on the Saturday, and Sam appeared in due course before the justices. Hetheridge failing to put in an appearance to sustain his charge, the case was dismissed; but the manner of the accused was still so strange that the Bench strongly advised that a careful supervision should be exercised over him. His wife promised that he should be well looked after, and there the local interest in the episode ended. The doctor paid a visit now and then, and called perhaps a little more frequently than the necessities of the case demanded. He was a youngish man, and had an inquiring turn of mind, and the mystery about the case made it interesting to him.

The patient remained completely taciturn, and seemed to take no earthly interest in the people and objects surrounding him; and when he had been in this condition for some time the doctor decided that something must be done to awake him from his lethargy. He called at the cottage one morning quite brisk and radiant.

"Mrs. Potter," he began, "I've hit upon the very thing for you. Here's an old Australian turned up, the son of my father's gardener. He found me out only yesterday—saw 'Doctor Hope' on the door-plate and came in on the chance of finding a relative of his father's old employer. He's been away for five-and-twenty years, gold-mining, shepherding, stock-riding, and what-not. He's made a little money, but not much, and he's willing to take some light employment which will bring him what he calls his tucker. You know what that means, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said Matilda. "Tucker means vittles, sir."



"So I gathered," returned the Doctor. "Well, now, this seems a decent sort of fellow, and I've spoken to him about your husband. I've told him he wants exercise and quiet companionship, and I think it not at all unlikely that if you will agree to the experiment it may do some good. The man's Australian all over, and his manner and his way of speech may help to start something in your husband's mind. I want them to take long rambles morning and afternoon together. I think it's a good idea—I know the exercise will do good, and I hope you'll agree to it."

Matilda was quite willing to try the experiment, though she looked upon it, perhaps naturally, with less hopeful eyes.

"The man's name," the Doctor continued, after her consent was secured, "is Atkins—William Atkins. I'll send him round at once, and you had better start your husband out for a walk with him this morning. It's a lovely day for a ramble."

Half an hour later the expected William Atkins presented himself—a big sunburned fellow with a great beard. He was a trifle gruff in manner, and unconventional in costume, but he had a kind and manly look, and the little woman liked him at first sight. He marched off with Sam, and brought him back punctually to the one-o'clock dinner—marched him off again after a digestive interval, and brought him back punctually to five-o'clock tea. He came next day for the same routine, and pursued it for many days thereafter, and for a long time, at every return to the house, Mrs. Potter questioned him as to her husband's behavior. Had he wakened up at all? Had he taken notice of anything or said anything? Sam's companion answered these inquiries so constantly in the negative, that at last Matilda grew disheartened, and forbore to make them any longer.

One bright morning, when the spring was merging into summer, Atkins came in as usual to breakfast, and offered his common salutation.

"Good-mornin', boss. How d'ye find yourself to-day?"

"Why," said Sam, breaking a four-months' silence, "I'm pretty cheerful, thank you, matey."

At this unexpected answer, the man stood open-eyed and open-mouthed, and Matilda rushed at her husband with a shriek of joy, and hung about him, laughing and crying at the same time.

"Oh, Sam, my poor dear darling, you're better. Ain't you, Sam? Do say you're better, Sam. Say you're getting right again."

"I'm all right," Sam answered with a strange stolidity. "There's nothing the matter with me."

"There has been though," interjected William Atkins. "I've known you now, boss, a matter of five months, and that's the first chin music I ever heard *you* play. It's about the last thing as ever I expected, too. I'd begun to think as he was goin' to put in the rest of his time a dummy, missis."

He marched Sam out as usual that morning, and though himself a man of few words, became quite bright and conversational. Sam answered now and then, but for the most part seemed to speak at random until pausing at a stile which had been a favorite lounge of theirs ever since the warm weather began, the two sat down side by side to smoke. Atkins had sunk into a state of dreamy contemplation, when he felt his companion's hand upon his arm, and turning, saw a new expression on his face. The vacuous look he had hitherto known was gone, and the man's soul was in his eyes again. The change was startling.

"I say, matey," said Sam, "haven't I seen you somewhere afore to-day?"

"Why, yes, you have, boss," Atkins responded. "I've been walkin' out with you every day for pretty nigh five months past."

"No," said Sam, "have you, though?" Atkins nodded in solemn affirmation. "That's odd," Sam mur-

mured to himself. "That's —— odd. Look here, matey, have I been queer again?"

"You have that," returned his comrade. "You've never spoke a word for pretty nearly half a year till this morning."

"They told me the same thing in Melbourne," Sam murmured again. "I've seen you somewhere afore," he added with a sudden renewed vivacity. "I'd take my Bible oath of it."

"You've got round again," said Atkins. "That's where it is, boss. We've been out a walkin' every day, and natural enough now you're all right again, you find you know me."

"That ain't it, matey," Sam retruned. "Look here. Was you ever in the Australias?"

"Five-and-twenty years, more or less."

"Was you ever up on the Wallagong? With a crowd of chaps that was cutting a bush track there?"

"Yes, I was," Atkins returned, staring at him curiously.

"You was cook to that crowd, wasn't you?"

"Yes, I was," Atkins said again.

"I see you there," said Sam, "and I remember what you was doing. You was stewing kangaroo tail in a billy."

"What makes you remember that?" his companion asked, doubtfully. "Why, that's a matter of twenty years ago."

"I had a bit of that stew, matey," Sam responded. "It was the first kangaroo tail I ever tasted, and that's why I remember it. Do you mind two young chaps, as was on the Wallaby for the first time—two young chaps fresh out from England—a regular young pair of tenderfoots—dropping in at your camp at sundown?"

"Why, yes," said Atkins, pulling at his huge sunburned beard, "I think I do."

"That was me and my mate, Bob Martin," said Sam. "Why, lord alive, it looks like yesterday. I don't wonder at your not knowin' me, matey. I never

had need to trouble the barber in them days. My chin 'was as smooth as an egg."

From the hour of this conversation, Sam's memory came back to him, unimpaired, save for two spaces in his history. Up to the moment at which he had left Matilda in Melbourne, intending to rejoin her upon the homeward-bound vessel, he recalled the details of his career with an almost singular clearness. Then came a blank of eighteen months, and then on again, from the time of recovered consciousness until the hour at which he set out for that Sunday-afternoon ramble which resulted in his encounter with Hetheridge, he seemed to remember everything which had befallen him. Then came another blank of nearly half a year, and there, as in the former space of darkness, memory groped in vain.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

IF all the hobbies Sir Eustace had ridden in his time had been turned by fairy agency into horses of flesh and blood, it would have taken half the stables of the county to accommodate them. Whilst the fit lasted he rode his hobby hard, but until now his whims had been of singularly short duration. But since the arrival of Monsieur Dom he seemed to have found a wonderfully steadfast mind. In the matter of grape culture, his will flowed right on from his Propontic to the Hellespont, and knew no ebb. Monsieur Dom was spurred by the enthusiasm of his employer. Sir Eustace found new fires in the contemplation of the ardor of Monsieur Dom, and the rivalry between Worcestershire and Essex lent its own separate impetus, so that at Upnor Hall the good people may be said to have lived in an atmosphere of grape.

André Dom more than justified his employer's hopes of him. He had the finest stocks in the world to work upon, and he produced something very like the ~~finest~~ finest possible result from them. All this, of course, was not done in a day, or ever in a year, but we are now at a point in the story where events slumber, and where for a considerable space of time there are no facts worth chronicling. It is strange, it is even appalling to notice on what slight and distant accidents the fate of any one of us depends. On the mere face of things there were few circumstances in the world less likely to shake the soul of a murderer from a dream of security than Sir Eustace's harmless hobby of grape-growing, and it was yet that which led to the most terrible shock the guilty soul of John Hetheridge had known.

Sir Eustace had accepted his sister's challenge *au grand sérieux*, and the lady found little difficulty in inspiring her husband with an equal determination. Mr. Weybridge was, in matters of legitimate business, far more occupied than Sir Eustace. He directed affairs of some magnitude in London, and was a man of boards and councils, but whatever time he could afford from his numerous employments he gave to viticulture. Mr. Weybridge was an Englishman, and would not quail before a wilderness of French experts in the art.

The rules of the county shows forbade competition from without the county borders, but exhibits not intended to win prizes were welcomed alike from Upnor and from Wellsted. In the first duel at either place matters were supposed to be pretty fairly equal. Mr. Weybridge beat all Essex, and Sir Eustace carried everything before him in Worcestershire. There was hardly a pin to choose between them, and admiring neighbors adjudged each of the rivals to have gained the *ne plus ultra*.

At the next contest Sir Eustace won clearly and definitely. Even his sister confessed it.

"There never were such grapes seen," she said, mournfully, to her husband. "Eustace has beaten us, John; we had better retire."

"No," Weybridge declared, sturdily, "I fight for the honor of old Essex. That Frenchman knows his business," he added somewhat grudgingly, "but I'll be even with him yet."

The Weybridge household was smitten with astonishment to learn that Monsieur Dom had not even thought them worthy of his best. He had beaten them, so to speak, with his second-string horse, and had sent the stable favorite to the Crystal Palace. Mrs. Weybridge read with dismay that Sir Eustace had gained first and second prizes in the great national show. At this, indeed she was feign to retire from further combat, but her enthusiasm of an earlier day had fired her husband,

and he was not easily to be extinguished. This is the way with the ladies. With their quick-burning intelligence they fire the slower male to purpose, and long after their own flame has expired, the coals they have kindled burn on. Weybridge nailed his colors to the mast. He would fight on for the honor of old Essex. He made costly alterations in his vineries. He employed all the latest improvements in respect to heating apparatus. He bought every book about vine culture that he could hear of, and he spent his spare evenings in their study. He held hour-long consultations with his head gardener, who was a Scotchman and pragmatist, and believed that he knew more in his own person about almost anything than it was in the power or the province of the world to teach him. He resisted all his employer's suggestions with slow, deliberate, Scottish argument, but on the sly adopted such of them as commended themselves to his reason. There is a kind of Scotchman who disputes by organic arrangement, and whose argumentative side holds no commerce with conviction. He leaps at once to demonstrate anything the contrary of which has already been demonstrated. If nothing were left to contradict, this particular breed of Scot would perish, but his contradictions are instinctive and not reasoned, so that even when black has triumphantly been established as white in argument, the Scotian irritator can still deal with it as being black for all practical purposes. And thus McBain, having proved to the hilt that a novel practice suggested by his employer was and must be deleterious, yet found his conscience allow him to test it, and finding it to be exactly what he had argued it was not, permitted himself to retain his old opinions.

The battle raged daily and weekly, and it is probable that from the days of Noah downward the grape has not been so much in dispute. In spite of everything Sir Eustace won in the next competition, and continued to win until on the expiry of half a dozen

years he was sated with triumph, and sought a new field for enterprise in the growth of orchids. Mrs. Weybridge, finding her husband's soul set on victory, and finding victory further away from him year by year, had been disposed to bribe Dom from his allegiance. If any but her brother had been her husband's rival, she would actually have essayed this task, but the certainty of Sir Eustace's bitter displeasure taught her to play fair. But when on one of her annual visits she found Sir Eustace cooling she besought him to transfer Dom's services to Wellsted. The baronet had triumphed often enough to be tired of triumph, and that the challenger of half a dozen years should now sue for the weapon by means of which she had been beaten made victory so complete that there was nothing more to be asked for.

"I fancy," he said, smiling like a conqueror who is willing to be gracious, "that Monsieur Dom is very well satisfied with his position here, but if you can persuade him you can have him. He has had young Fergus under him all this while and has so inoculated him into his own habits and doctrines that in point of fact I think I might get on without him. In two or three years' time, if you care about it, Julia, we may have a new fight. Dom against Fergus."

"Oh," she cried, "you're really too braggadocio. It would delight my soul to take you down a peg."

"Well," returned Sir Eustace, "there's the gauge of battle. Persuade Weybridge to take it up and I'll fight you on those lines."

There was still Monsieur Dom to be settled with, and it turned out that he was not willing to be uprooted. He had shaken down to his English home, had gathered his household gods about him, and had found that they planted a fixed foot. They would not willingly seek Lavinian shores. Weybridge, being communicated with, offered a handsome advance upon the salary Sir Eustace had paid him, but still he objected to



be moved, and it was not until Mrs. Weybridge encroached, to the extent of fifty pounds a year, upon her own ample supply of pin-money, that he consented.

All this time Hetheridge had been living in the surety of escape from all possible consequences of his crime. He cherished that insane belief even whilst the crime poisoned every well-spring of his life and made his days and nights a slow-drawn inescapable purgatory. He was at once the torturer and the executioner. Nothing is eternally the same, and there were changes in his sufferings, and even spells of repose, but he never knew when the mandate would issue for the self-infliction of new agonies. Sometimes, for a week together, he could be alone at night-time without fear, but as a rule solitude in darkness was the one thing he most dreaded in the world. After all his main misery lay in the fact that he had achieved the one purpose to which his whole being had been bent. Could he have slain his enemy and have had him still to slay, the pangs of conscience would have mattered nothing, and the excitement of hate and hope would have upborne him beyond the reach of fear. But Redwood had escaped him by the one gateway through which he could not pass. Hetheridge's own hand had robbed him of his one great aim, his one delight, his preoccupation, his solace, his hope, his almost everything.

He could not escape from the knowledge of the fact that his passion for Mrs. Redwood was not what it had been. He had always had vulgar amours, the merest animalisms, in which affection had no place, but Ellice had always been the one woman in the world to him, and in spite of the failing nature of his desire for her, she was so still. He knew full well that there could be no more hope of happiness or even of dull contentment for him. He knew that even if he should win her regard, which seemed improbable, and should secure her for his wife, her presence in his house would be a continuous threat and terror to him, and

yet there was something, in spite of cold judgment and fading desire, which prompted him to pursue her. If she resisted him until the end, his revenge upon George Redwood, baffled already by its very nature, would be incomplete indeed.

His business affairs had assumed such a magnitude and complexity that he sometimes grew giddy in the contemplation of them. By this time he was a millionaire, but he found his wealth of little advantage to him, apart from the fact that it afforded him the wherewithal for an exciting and protracted gamble, which did in some measure absorb his mind and hold him from the consideration of those terrible and unwelcome themes which waited on his leisure. It had grown to be a regular habit with him to visit Wellsted for the first Sunday of the month, arriving on the Saturday afternoon and leaving by the first train on Monday morning. On these occasions he invariably made two ceremonious visits, one to the Rev. Jordan Farrell, where he awkwardly inspected little Ellice, feeling abashed and clumsy in her presence, and the other to Mrs. Redwood, who, though she received him with an unchanging cold kindness, had no power to put him at his ease. As time went on, he dropped hints, sometimes veiled and reticent, but oftener awkwardly ill-concealed, as to the purpose of his visits. These conveyed no information to Mrs. Redwood's mind, for she had long since recognized his purpose. In a way, she was sorry for him, for she thought him honest and devoted. Mrs. Weybridge occasionally rallied her on her coldness to a suitor, who, at all events on the financial side, was so desirable.

"You know, dear," she would say, "the man is dying to marry you. You've only to give him the least bit of encouragement. A million is a large sum, and there are not many men who are allowed to go wooing with it unsuccessfully."

Mrs. Redwood would have none of him. Perhaps if poor George's death had been less tragic she might

have learned, in course of time, as other women had done before and have done since then, to accept consolation, but as things stood her heart was in the coffin there with Cæsar, and there was no remotest hope of its coming back to her. The whole township of Wellsted thought the more of her for having so wealthy a suitor, and what with her own modest competence and the countenance afforded her by Mrs. Weybridge, she occupied a better social position by this time than she had ever hoped for during her husband's life. She was not an ambitious woman, and this fact, so far as it affected herself alone, afforded her little gratification, though for her boy's sake she could find the heart to be glad of it. George was just turned thirteen, was growing to be the very image of his father, and was the apple of the widow's eye. There was no making the lad effeminate, or there might have been some danger to him in the natural selfishness of the bereaved mother's intense affection. She could scarcely bear to trust him from her sight, and when his spirit of boyish adventure led him away, as it did often, she would conjure up more mishaps in the course of a spring morning than would have made a chapter of accidents for one unfortunate life-time.

It came about that on the very day on which André Dom entered upon his duties at Weybridge Hall, Hetheridge made the first deviation from his settled habit, and appeared in Wellsted in the middle of the month upon a Wednesday. After long buffeting to and fro, he had at length made up his mind to speak to Ellice Redwood. His purpose had burned in him with an unexpected warmth for days, and had grown hotter than ever as the train bore him down from London through the flat south-eastern country. But by the time he had reached the town he had gone cold upon it. The figure of George Redwood stood between himself and Redwood's wife, and he felt that he scarcely dared the purposed encounter. His wandering indeterminate footsteps led him away from the town

when he landed at the railway station, which in the last year or two had intruded on the sleepy quiet of the place, and it was not until an hour's walk in the crisp air had set the blood flowing freely in his veins that he was sufficiently recovered to resolve once more on carrying his purpose into effect. He turned back upon his own footsteps with a sudden determination, and the brisk motion of a few minutes brought him in sight of the lodge gates of Weybridge Hall. A mere instant later he saw Mrs. Redwood pass through the gates from the roadway, to all appearance without having recognized or even noticed him. This was natural enough, for she was accompanied by the two children, Ellice Hetheridge, and her own son, George. She had an arm about the neck of either, and was bending over them, and they were both looking up at her as if absorbed in listening. Hetheridge quickened his pace by instinct, and reached the gate in time to see one of the domestics of the house pointing Mrs. Redwood in the direction of the vineries.

He was not on terms of intimacy with the inmates of Weybridge Hall, but he was well enough known to call without fear of being considered impertinent, and after deliberating for a second or two he walked boldly up the drive. Mrs. Redwood had already parted with the children, and they were out of sight.

She pursued her way leisurely, and he followed at some distance. The outer door leading to the vineries stood open, an inner door a few feet beyond it was closed but not locked. Mrs. Redwood passed through, and in the act of turning to close the second door saw that somebody approached her. The warmth and moisture of the place left a steam upon the glass, through which outside objects were seen dim and distorted. She had no reason to suspect Hetheridge's presence, or even then she might have recognized his figure, but as it was she passed on and gave it no further thought. The domestic had informed her that Mr. and Mrs. Weybridge were in the vineries, with

the foreign person who had come to take charge of them. They had been there, she learned, for an hour or two. The structure was divided into chambers, and having been added to from time to time, the various ways through it wandered like a maze, so that Hetheridge in pursuing Mrs. Redwood had to be guided by the sound of her footsteps and the rustle of her dress. He came up with her at length, and she turned with a little start of surprise to find him unexpectedly so near.

"You have no ill news, I hope," she said, remarking the unusual pallor of his face and the disturbed air he wore.

"None in the world," he answered. "I may have before I go back to town."

"I hope not," she returned. "Have you any reason to expect it?"

"You are sure you hope not?" said Hetheridge. "Quite sure you hope I may carry no ill news back with me?"

"Quite sure," she answered, not yet understanding him.

Neither of them were aware of the immediate neighborhood of André Dom. The little man had been left there only a few minutes earlier by his new employers, and was tranquilly awaiting their return. He peeped through the wide crack of the door, which stood half open, and stood as if fascinated at the sight of Hetheridge's face. There was the man whom he had once charged in his own mind with having borne his name with no less a purpose than to commit a murder under it. The supposition had been wild enough, in all conscience, and from the first he had never afforded a more than superstitious credence to it. He had long ago dismissed it as an absurd fancy, and yet it had stuck in his mind, as such things will. He had pooh-poohed it a hundred times, and with the lapse of years it had almost died away; but at the sight of its object, the suspicion sprang again to instant life and vigor. It was none the less vigorous that he recognized Mrs.

Redwood as Hetheridge's momentary companion. He took one silent step nearer to the door to enlarge his field of observation, and stood there like a figure of watchfulness, scarcely breathing in his intense desire to see and hear.

"Ellice," said Hetheridge, with a demeanor on the outside somewhat sullen and forbidding, "I have waited for seven years. I've waited for more than that, God knows. I have been waiting all my life."

"Pray, Mr. Hetheridge," she cried, with her hand set out against him, palms foremost, as if to hold his very meaning away from her. "Pray, say no more."

"I have made up my mind to speak at last," he answered, doggedly, "and I must do it. I have been your faithful servant, Mrs. Redwood, ever since you can remember—almost ever since I can remember. I was in love with you before I went into trousers. We promised one another when we were children that we'd get married when we grew up. You forgot that, Ellice, but I never did. I've never changed or varied from then till now. I never have, and never can, and never shall. Haven't you got a word of hope for me after all these years?"

For sole answer she shook her head.

"Ellice," he continued, "you don't know what it means to me. You don't know what I've been through. It's fourteen years since I left England. There was never a man in the wide world cared more for a woman than I did then. I don't say anything about what I can offer you, because I know that you're one of those that money doesn't count for much with. But I'm a rich man, my dear, even as rich men count in London. If you wanted a palace you could have it. There isn't a wish of your heart I couldn't gratify. I haven't been too sudden, have I? I've tried not to be impatient."

"Don't spoil our friendship, John," she answered. "I've liked you better since——" Her head drooped, her voice broke, and for a moment she failed to com-

plete the phrase. A little later she looked up bravely and went on. "I have liked you better since that dreadful time than ever I did before, but we can never be any more to each other than we are."

"Ellice," he said, with a jealous passion burning in his eyes. "You'd have married me if George had never come between us."

"No," she responded, "never."

"You promised," he cried. "You promised it. Over and over again you promised it." -

"John," she answered, with a heightened color, "you have no right to tell me that. They were baby promises, made before I was ten years of age. What value can they have now for you and me?"

"You loved me," said Hetheridge, "till he came between us."

"No, John," she said. "I never loved but one man in the world, and never shall."

Perhaps if George Redwood had been taken from her in some less mysterious and terrible fashion, Hetheridge's devotion, as she believed in it, might have had a greater weight with her. She had no suspicion of the awful truth. How should she have? He spoke no more than truth in telling her that he had loved her ever since she could remember.

"You let me think otherwise," he answered, bitterly. "I won't ask if you'd a right to do that. Women don't wait to consider whether they have rights or no in such a case."

"Do you wait," she asked him, almost fiercely, "to think what right you have to address me in this way? Did you ever have a sign or a word from me, after I was twelve years of age, to make you think such things? There, John, we won't quarrel. I shall always like you as a friend, but I shall never marry again."

She held out her hand, and for a moment he stood irresolute. Then he reached out his hand and ac-

cepted hers, wringing it so hard that he brought a spasm of pain to her face.

"Good-by, John," she said. "We'll say no more of this. Let us be friends still as we have been."

He gave no answer, and with a lingering regretful glance or two she moved away. The watcher glued his eyes upon Hetheridge's face, which was horribly contorted. Weybridge's voice abruptly broke the silence, calling from a little distance:

"Dom! André Dom!"

The name seemed to strike Hetheridge like a bullet. His mouth gaped and his eyes dilated with horror. He took one staggering step forward and clutched a vine branch near at hand to save himself from falling.

"My God!" he groaned, "Who calls?"



## CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. REDWOOD glided back to him in an instant. She had heard the agonized cry following on the calling of the name of her husband's murderer, but she had not caught Hetheridge's words.

"It is nothing," she said, in great agitation. "The name startled me when I heard it, but I have grown used to it. Mrs. Weybridge has talked about the man a hundred times. He has come here to take charge of the vinery."

Hetheridge stared at her, stricken and panting. Her words were clear enough, but they scarcely seemed to bear a meaning for him. The calling of the name had been like the very voice of doom to him, and he was so profoundly moved by the sudden horror of it that he was altogether unable to conceal his agitation. His lips moved as if he would have spoken, but no sound escaped from them. He still grasped the vine with one hand, and the other clutched his coat above his heart.

"I was startled," he managed to say at last, when Mrs. Redwood's words began to bear some meaning for him. "Horribly startled."

There was to his companion's mind nothing remarkable in the fact of his being agitated, and not much that was strange even in the overwhelming nature of the shock he had received. She herself, as may easily be imagined, was not unmoved. She was little capable of judging the meaning of facial expression at that moment, and when she had time to think over the scene in quiet the natural conclusion at which she arrived was that Hetheridge was not altogether sound about the heart. She had some friendly fears for him

on that account, recalling the ghastly pallor of his face and the blue tinge of his lips.

Mr. Weybridge's voice was heard again, and this time Monsieur Dom answered.

"Oh, you're there," cried Weybridge. "I'll be with you in a moment." His voice was heard for a while in a deep hum, and then grew nearer and clearer.

"I will go," Hetheridge whispered. "I have no business here."

"They will think it odd," Mrs. Redwood answered, "if you should leave without speaking and they should see you. You had better stay."

The question was set at rest by Weybridge's entrance. He greeted Mrs. Redwood cordially and shook hands with Hetheridge, but his looks expressed surprise at the aspect they presented.

"You're unwell, Mr. Hetheridge," he said. "The warmth and humidity of the air here have an effect sometimes."

Before Hetheridge could respond Mrs. Weybridge appeared upon the scene in animated conversation with Monsieur Dom, to whom she was fluently imparting her opinions on the art of grape culture. She broke off short at sight of her visitor, and ran forward to embrace her, kissing her on both cheeks.

"My dear Ellice," she cried, "you are as cold as the grave. What is the matter with you?"

Hetheridge fell a little apart and signalled to Weybridge, who crossed over to him at once, and in obedience to a further gesture took a few paces from the rest of the party.

"Mrs. Redwood," Hetheridge began, "was making a call here, and I took the liberty to accompany her."

He had not yet mastered his agitation. His breath halted and his eyes still wore a look of fear.

"No liberty," Weybridge answered. "I am pleased to see you, Mr. Hetheridge."

"You startled both of us," Hetheridge continued, in a tremulous half whisper, "when you called out that

man's name. It has an association for both of us. It is the name——"

Weybridge checked him by a motion of the hand, and cast a sudden sidelong glance in the direction of his wife's guest.

"I know," he said, "I know. I can quite understand."

"Poor Redwood was my earliest friend," Hetheridge declared. "You can scarcely fancy how the name shocked me when I heard it so unexpectedly."

Dom, standing apart, kept a glittering eye on Hetheridge. He had not only seen his face at the moment at which Weybridge called, but had distinctly caught the words he uttered. They sounded strangely suspicious to his ears, and his old wild fancy was revived and strengthened. Curiosity had led him to learn all that could be learned of André Dom in Upnor, and the mystery of that vanished villain's motive in murdering George Redwood was as insoluble as ever. Not a creature could the real André Dom hear of, save Hetheridge, who had even a passing spite against George Redwood. The man had been so friendly with the world, so candid and open in his dealings with it, that he had given spite and hatred no fair chance against him. Hetheridge had threatened his life, and had been violent a score of times in his promises of vengeance for his imaginary wrongs. All these things Monsieur Dom had learned, and had conned over many times.

Whilst the colloquy went on between Hetheridge and the master of the house, a few hurried whispers to a similar purpose were exchanged between the two women, and in the turn of a hand the situation so far as they could understand it, was made clear.

"Monsieur Dom," called Mrs. Weybridge, addressing the little man in his own tongue, "your name has been a cause of trouble here."

She was quite certain that save Monsieur Dom himself, nobody would understand a word of what she was saying.

"I know it well, madame," Dom responded.

"How?" she asked. "You know it?"

"Surely madame remembers that I have spent years in the village where the murder took place. I will not name it lest the friend of madame should hear it, and should suppose that we talk of her. I am interested in that history, madame, and I have my own theories and ideas about it."

He turned his gaze upon Hetheridge as he spoke, and was convinced that he was understood. Hetheridge, with his eyes cast down and on one side away from Dom, was obviously listening with all his ears.

"Really?" answered Mrs. Weybridge. "And what are your theories, Monsieur Dom."

"Ah, madame," he responded. "When one has theories about a crime so grave as murder he had better be satisfied with silence until he has ripened suspicion into certainty."

He glanced at Hetheridge again. The intensely listening attitude was relaxed ever so little.

"I am sure of one thing," Dom pursued, keeping his eye on Hetheridge this time, and remarking how keenly the figure seemed to string itself anew to listen. "The scoundrel who bore my name had known me somewhere. I have often wondered if he met me in Australia."

There Hetheridge turned and encountered Dom's look. His own face was horrible to see, and his left hand was clutching at his coat above the heart again.

"I beg pardon," said Monsieur Dom, suavely addressing him in English. "It is rude to converse in a foreign language, unless it is understood. Do you speak French, sir?"

"Not a word," responded Hetheridge, in a voice so strange that everybody turned to look at him.

"You're ill," cried Weybridge. "Dom, assist me in helping Mr. Hetheridge into the open air."

Hetheridge submitted to their aid and guidance, and was set upon a rustic chair near the entrance to

the vinery. Mrs. Weybridge pressed upon him a bottle of smelling-salts, and he sat sniffing mechanically at its contents, his head whirling meanwhile, and his heart in an agony of fear.

"Now why should you have told me that lie, my friend?" Dom asked silently. He was as sure that he had been understood as he had ever been of anything.

"You must come into the house," said Mrs. Weybridge, "and rest yourself for a time. A glass of wine will be good for you?"

Hetheridge made some slight resistance, but permitted himself to be overpowered. His host lent him an arm and piloted him across the lawn. Mrs. Redwood walked sympathetically on the other side, Mrs. Weybridge enlacing her waist with one arm. Dom stayed behind and kept company with his own fancies, being more completely persuaded every minute that he had fathomed the Upnor mystery. He was fain to confess that even if he had done as he supposed, there were yet other mysteries to be solved, but he could set only one construction on the things he had seen and heard.

Hetheridge was petted a good deal before he was allowed to go away. Mrs. Redwood, in especial, was sorry for him, and was bent on proving that her coldness of an hour before related wholly to the lover, and was not intended in any wise to touch the friend. Being out of reach of Dom's disturbing influence, he recovered his self-possession, and as the best means of disarming a suspicion which all the time he believed to be impossible, he spoke to Weybridge of the accident which had upset him and claimed acquaintance-ship with Dom.

"I am afraid he must have thought me either very forgetful or very cool," he said, "for I knew him quite well in Australia, and at one time employed him. He had charge of a vineyard of mine, but I was lost in the bush and reported dead, and I had never met him since until to-day. The name, you see," he added, with a

dreadful attempt to smile, "was associated more strongly with that villain who owned it down at Upnor than with him."

He and Weybridge were alone at this time, or he would not have dared this allusion to the murder. To Weybridge the man's agitation seemed to be natural enough, though the intensity of it looked alarming.

"You ought to get yourself overhauled by a doctor, Mr. Hetheridge. Depend upon it, your state wants looking into. A strong man like yourself should not have been so overcome. The closeness of the atmosphere and the shock acted together, no doubt, but you are probably working too hard or have got out of order somehow."

"I felt a pain here," Hetheridge answered, indicating by a gesture the region of the heart. "A swift shooting pain. I shall see a medical man when I get back to town."

He was glad of an opportunity for pretence, for he knew that he had been dangerously near to a betrayal of himself even if he had not, so far as Dom was concerned, actually fallen into it. Why had the man looked at him so? Was there any meaning in the measured balance of his tone when he had said that the man who bore his name had known him? What of that allusion to Australia? Unless it were meant to probe, to startle, it looked meaningless.

As he walked toward the hotel, at which on his periodical visits to Wellsted he invariably stayed, he felt that he moved amongst fires. The thought of danger dulled the sting of Ellice's refusal. He had no time to think of that whilst it was possible after all these years of immunity his neck might even yet be in danger.

Monsieur Dom, who was naturally of a sociable turn of mind, and a student of humanity into the bargain, betook himself to the hotel that evening and sat down in the bar-parlor. He wanted to see among what manner of men his new lot was cast, and hoped in the

course of time to choose a companion or two with whom to exchange ideas. At Upnor he had found the society in the homely parlor of the Black Bull to be active against the tedium of long winter evenings, and for an old bachelor there was little better company to be found than he could discover amidst the respectable frequenters of an old-fashioned hostelry.

He called for his modest glass of well-watered brandy, lit his pipe, took up one of that morning's London papers, and settled himself until such time as the guests should begin to arrive. By and by a great bearded sunburned fellow entered and took his seat in a corner. The neat maid, entering with him, offered him a smiling good-evening, to which he replied with a gruff good-humor. He gave no order, but the maid seemed to know his ways, and bustling from the room, returned in half a minute with a quart pewter filled with a dark brown beverage not unlike beer in appearance, but without a trace of foam on the top of it. The pewter was flanked with a basin of coarse brown sugar; and in the basin lay a table-spoon. The bearded man stirred three spoonfuls of the coarse sugar into the beverage before him, and Monsieur Dom regarding this, made a wry face unconsciously. The neat maid laughed.

"I dare say now," said the maid, "the gentleman thinks you're taking sugar with your beer, Mr. Potter."

"Mr. Potter," said Dom, rising. "How do you do, Mr. Potter? I thought I knew you, but I was not sure until I heard your name. Is your head any better than it was that morning in Melbourne about ten years ago?"

"Why, bless my soul," cried Sam, "it's the little Frenchman. How are you, matey? Bring your liquor over here and sit down. I'm glad to see you."

"And I," responded Monsieur Dom, "am very glad to be seen. You are back to old England again. Are you settled here?"

"Have been for years, matey," Sam responded.

"Got a wife here, and as fine a kid as ever you set eyes on. He's cutting his teeth this minute."

Monsieur Dom congratulated him, and the two settled into talk about old times and new. Whilst they were in the thick of their discourse another big, sun-burned, bearded man came in.

"Well, boss," he exclaimed, smiting Potter on the shoulder with an enormous hand, "how goes it?"

"It goes," Sam answered, "like steam. It goes like clockwork, matey. It goes as well as anything could be expected to."

"Good iron," said the new-comer, and pulling a chair up to the table, took his seat. The maid came in, and receiving a nod from the late arrival, went out again, and returned with a foaming tankard.

"You're sticking to the tea, boss," he said, looking into Sam's quart measure.

"Yes," Sam answered. "I'm sticking to the tea. There's nothing like it. You two don't know each other, do you? Well, you're both old mates of mine, and that's good enough, ain't it?"

On this ample introduction Dom and the bearded man nodded at each other and drank together.

"I've had a facer to-night, boss," said the latest arrival; "a real right down regular facer. You might have crumpled me up with a feather for about five minutes. I never was that staggered in all my puff."

Sam being duly astonished and interested at this exordium, his companion plunged into a history which almost from its beginning fascinated Monsieur Dom.

"I've talked to you, boss," he began, addressing Sam, "about a mate o' mine as answered to the name of Joe." Sam nodded to signify attention. "We two," the narrator continued, hooking Dom into the conversation with a sun-tanned forefinger, and then leaning heavily on the table as if to compose himself for a long story. "We two was boundary riding in the Wallagong district nine or ten years ago. Joe lighted on a chap in the bush, stark naked, mad with



thirst, and as near his latter end as made no matter. We got the chap into our hut, and we took turn an turn about to nurse him. It took a matter o' three weeks to pull him round again. While he was lying there somebody rode by and left a Melbourne paper with us, and there we read about a cove named Hetheridge who'd got bushed between Wallagong and Baker's Creek. The paper give him up for dead, but our comin' on the chap we found within thirty mile of where the other one was lost, started us on the notion, don't you see, that these two was the same."

"Yes," Dom assented, more eager to conceal his curiosity than to express it; "that was very natural."

"Well," resumed the historian, "when the chap got round a bit we asked, me and Joe, if his name wasn't Hetheridge? No, he said, it wasn't. His name was Cashmore. That's what he said his name was, Cashmore. He was a sneakin' good-for-nothin' brute. He'd got a lot of money with him as we found with his coat, right in his tracks a hundred yards away from where he was lyin'. He pretended it didn't belong to him—said he'd got it on trust, and couldn't touch a penny of it to save him from starvation. Of course, neither me nor Joe wanted his money, but we didn't like the bloke's meanness, and as soon as he was fit to go, we fired him out. I never set eyes on him again from that day to this—until to-night."

"To-night," cried Dom, startled into a display of the interest he had meant to hide.

"To-night," said the historian, banging his heavy hand upon the table. "He's in this house now, or was at all events when I come into it. Now mark you, boss, me and Joe saved that hang-dog beggar's life. He denied his very name to us. I suppose he thought we might find out as he was rich—he was worth a quarter of a million, so they say—and he thought we might go and sponge on him. And so he lied to the very men who saved his life and nursed him like a brother for a fortnight."

"Didn't you say he was here, matey?" Sam questioned.

"Here, yes," the other answered. "He shouldered me outside at the door as mighty as you please. I turned round on him, and 'Hullo, Cashmore,' I says, 'how are you?' 'You're mistook,' says he, 'my good man. I don't know you, and that ain't my name.' With that he goes upstairs. Well, I stood and cussed a bit. Did you hear me?"

"No," Sam answered. "Me and my matey here was talkin' between ourselves."

"Ah," said the other, "that accounts for it. I was as sure about him as I was about you, but that old booster, the waiter, comes up and, says he, 'Boss, you're mistook. That's Mr. Hetheridge; a party as well beknown here as the town pump.' Now," he concluded, banging the table with his great hand again, and staring fiercely from one auditor to the other, "what do you think of that for a start?"

Before either of them could express an opinion, the latch of the door clicked and Hetheridge himself entered the room. He took three or four steps forward before looking round and then sighting Dom, made as if he would retire, but the indignant reciter of his meanness in the Australian bush had so stirred his own bile by the narration of his story that he was impelled to leap to his feet and to set his broad back against the door.

"You don't know me, Cashmore?" he asked, wrathfully.

"No," snapped Hetheridge, in a cold disdain. "I do not know you."

"Do you know a nose-ender when you get one?" the big bearded man shouted. "Why, you skulkin' cur. You lyin' thief——"

"Come, come, matey," said Sam, rising to interpose. "Take it easy. If he's what you say he is, it ain't worth while to get into a wax about him, is it? I know him well enough myself. I've got somethin'

again him, but I don't know rightly what it is, and it mithers me to think about it."

Dom's glittering eye was fixed once more on Hetheridge with a look of strange meaning. The criminal felt that the gaze held a threat, and his heart stood still within him.

"I saved your life, you skulking hound," cried the man at the door, "and you denied your name to me. 'Is your name Hetheridge?' says I, and 'No,' says you; 'I never heard of the man!' Looked me straight in the face," he cried; "told that lie to the men who dragged him out of the grave!"

"Ah, well," said Dom. "It may be a mistake. Mr. Hetheridge has forgotten me, I dare say, but I was once in his service."

"I remember you well enough," Hetheridge answered, "but as for this fellow, I never saw him before. If I did," he added, raising a hand in answer to a threatening gesture from his accuser. "If I did I have no memory of it. Anybody who knows my history will tell you that for two years after I was lost in the bush I had no memory of my own identity. I let a fortune lie unclaimed all that time and had trouble enough in recovering it."

"You can't fool me," his accuser answered. "You knew me when you saw me. I could tell that in your eye, and when you left that hut up in the Wallagong you were as sane as you are now. That pig won't fly, boss; you'd better find another."

Hetheridge laid his hand upon the bell.

"Will you let me pass?" he asked, "or shall I ring for the police?"

Sam Potter swung his companion from the door, and Monsieur Dom, never turning that shining glance of his away from Hetheridge, opened it and bowed a little.

"I shall hope," he said, in his own precise and faintly foreign accent, "to have the pleasure of meeting you again?"

Hetheridge walked out, frigidly defiant to look at,

but his heart was like water, and an actual bodily anguish of fear sent a tremor through him from head to foot.

Wellsted was too hot for him, and in the solitude of his own room he determined to visit it no more. In his cowed and broken state he resolved to accept Mrs. Redwood's decision as final, and next morning he took train for London. Once there, he plunged into business with burning ardor to escape from the pressure of his own dread, as a man plunges into a thicket to avoid a dangerous enemy. Work, hitherto intrusted to subordinate hands, he took upon himself, and he labored like a business Hercules. His affairs grew and multiplied, but he controlled them all, working at perpetual fever heat, lest his own thoughts should assail him. After a great space of time his fears of suspicion and ultimate detection grew faint. The avenging voices which had seemed to cry him down sank into silence, but even then work was his one narcotic, and only in the wild world of speculation could he lose the accusing phantom of George Redwood.

## CHAPTER XX.

MISS ELLICE HETHERIDGE was growing up into a charming girl, and she enjoyed all the social advantages which naturally grouped themselves about the only child of an exceptionally wealthy man. Sam Potter and Tilda were the only people who could have disputed Hetheridge's claim to paternity, and at this time of day their story, had they chosen to tell it, would have carried very little weight indeed. Like sensible people, they kept their own counsel, and the child grew up toward womanhood without in the least suspecting that there was anything unusual in her antecedents. She was afraid of her father, who, in their rare interviews with each other, was invariably cold and gloomy, and she knew that he was not in the least like the fathers of other girls, who had at least occasional caresses for their children and who really did seem to care a little to have their homes sweetened and brightened by a daughter's presence. As she grew older she was supplied with money in an almost absurd profusion. She was never sent to school, but the Rev. Jordan Farrell was instructed by his patron to find the best masters for her, and since, in a little place like Wellsted, the best masters were not procurable close at hand, the costliness of Miss Hetheridge's education became a common theme of gossip in the town.

With a thousand influences about her which all tended more or less to spoil her, she remained unspoiled, and grew up with a singularly free, buoyant, unaffected and friendly nature. The Rev. Jordan Farrell, with an added pomposity of manner, did *kotow* before her. His wife and the whole household fol-

lowed suit, and the lesser town magnates and trades-folk treated her as if she were a princess at the least. The Weybridges, who were the native rulers of the place, and had been for more generations than anybody not a Weybridge cared to count, received her on terms of equality, and were honestly fond of her; as, indeed, was everybody who knew her. But the girl's one favorite was Mrs. Redwood, who returned her affection in full measure, pressed down and running over. The two were like mother and daughter.

Whilst the daughter of the hard-handed, undistinguished, ill-starred Bob Martin, stricken down in the Australian wilds by a black fellow's spear so long ago, grew in graces and accomplishment, and began by virtue of beauty and money to turn the heads of half the gilded youth of the county, young George Redwood was striding rapidly on toward manhood. The two young people saw a great deal of each other, and quarrelled and made friends again in quite brotherly and sisterly fashion until Ellice was fifteen and George seventeen or thereabouts. Then they began to fight shy of each other, and after George's absences at school, and later on at College, would meet with an amazing cold dignity, the frost of which was only occasionally dispelled.

Ever since her recovery from the first shock of her husband's tragic and mysterious death, Mrs. Redwood had devoted herself with such an entirety of self-sacrifice as only good mothers know to the welfare of her boy. With a view to his education and subsequent well-being she had saved and managed and contrived for years, so that by the time at which he was sent to Cambridge she had quite a nice little sum laid by for him, and was in no dread of the expenses of education. The value of the Worcestershire property had from various causes considerably increased, so that now she was in receipt of a yearly income amounting to very nearly nine hundred pounds. George's expenses not counted, she lived on about a third of this, and the

young fellow himself, though of a generous and free-handed disposition, had good sense in plenty, and never caused her a moment's uneasiness by extravagance.

He passed creditably if not brilliantly through his college course, and came out at the close of it with the degree of bachelor of arts. His choice of a profession had been made long since. He was resolved to become a civil engineer, and he had directed the major part of his studies to that end. His mother had received news of his success by letter, and George, once assured of his degree, had gone straight from Cambridge to London to arrange for a term of study with an eminent firm of engineers.

Mrs. Redwood sat alone in the early dusk of the summer evening, expecting her son's return. The French windows of the room were opened on the trim little lawn, and the scented air stole in softly. The time and the place spoke peace, and her heart was in unison with them. The tragedy which had shaken her life so many years ago was never to be forgotten, but time is merciful to the suffering, and the flow of the hours, and days, and years had dulled the keen edge of remembrance. The inscription of grief was still engraven on her heart, but it had lost its old keenness of outline. Her own maternal love had atoned for much; and the affection her son gave her in return for it brought into her life a tranquil contentment for which she had never even dared to hope in the earlier years of widowhood.

She sat musing in the quiet of the deepening twilight, with her son's last letter in her hands. It told her that George had completed his arrangements in town, and was coming to spend a final month with her before entering on the serious business of his life-time. The train was due in half an hour, and all the preparations for the reception of the most welcome and honored guest the house could hold were completed. The

widow's heart throbbed with a gentle pride in her boy, and in her thoughts of him his father lived again.

"May I come in?" said a pleasant voice from the lawn, and the widow started from her reverie.

"Is that you, Ellice? Yes, dear, come in by all means. Let me ring for the lamp?"

"No, dear," said the new-comer, intercepting her when her hand was already on the bell-rope; "don't ring. I like this twilight. Sit down again, and I will take off my hat. I have come up for a good long satisfying talk."

She kissed Mrs. Redwood impetuously, drew her back to the chair she had vacated, and pushing an ottoman to the side of it with the point of her foot, sat down and drew Mrs. Redwood's arm about her neck.

"There, mamma," she said, "that's cozy, isn't it?"

The pretty young face looked rather ghostly in the twilight, though it wore a very pleasant smile.

"Yes, dear," Mrs. Redwood answered, "it's very comfortable. And now, what are we going to talk about? Let me open my budget of news first. George has taken his degree."

"I know that," said the girl. "I saw it in the newspapers. Mr. Farrell showed it to me four days ago."

"He is coming home to-night. He'll be here in half an hour."

"Then," said Miss Hetheridge, with an affectation of discontent, "my talk is spoiled."

"Won't it keep?" the widow asked.

"Oh, it will keep, and be none the worse, perhaps, if it were kept forever. It was all girls' nonsense. You know what girls are, don't you? I do believe," she added, with unexpected vivacity, "that girls are the most frivolous, foolish creatures in the world."

She sat bolt upright to offer this judgment, with both hands clasping her knees, but having delivered it, sank back into her former posture and drew her companion's arm about her neck once more.



"What gives you this very poor opinion of girls, my dear?" Mrs. Redwood asked her, turning to caress her hair with her disengaged hand.

"Observation in general," Miss Hetheridge answered, "and introspection in particular. I am frivolous and feather-headed enough, goodness knows, but I'm a positive pearl of wisdom and solidity compared with some of them. I wish I had been born a man."

She would have found few of the sex whose place she coveted to share with her in this aspiration. Most men would have been content to leave her as she was. An engaging face, at once tender and candid, a charming figure, and a voice of very music. These were the young lady's obvious attractions, but she had other qualities which, though less evident to the public gaze, were quite as real and perhaps even more valuable and charming. In short, not to enter upon a mere catalogue of perfections, she was a thoroughly good, warm-hearted, loyal girl, of a pattern essentially English.

"You think you'd be happier as a man, dear?" Mrs. Redwood asked.

"No," Miss Hetheridge answered, resolutely. "I don't see what right people have to be always asking to be happy." She had been reading "Sartor Resartus" of late, and plagiarized with the strongest possible belief in her own originality. "One might be able to be of some use in the world if one were a man. I want to be doing something. I don't want merely to be happy. I want to find a duty, and to do it."

All this was very much Greek to Mrs. Redwood, who had simply been doing her duty all her life-time with no desire or necessity for the making of phrases about it, and who knew nothing of the vague unrest which filled her young companion's mind. These things are a matter of fashion. That same vague unrest of which one hears so much nowadays is a product of the latter half of the century. The little reading

and little thinking folk of the eighteen thirties and forties had never experienced it.

"You'll find your duty, dear," said the elder woman, gently. She might not quite understand the girl, but she loved her dearly and that did just as well. "A woman's duty," she added, with the wisdom her own sorrows had taught her, "is mostly to put up with things, and try to make them smooth for other people."

"But I want to be doing something," cried the girl. "But I didn't mean to bother you with all this, and I have a hundred pleasanter things to talk about than Me. I do declare this Me is the greatest trouble one has to contend with. It's always getting in the way. Me. Me. Me! Give Me what I want. Oh, we are selfish, despicable creatures! All but you, mamma, dear," she interjected, rising in a sudden tender fury and hugging Mrs. Redwood in both arms. "You never think about yourself at all, or if you do, I never hear of it. There now, I won't think or talk Me any more. I shall sit down here and be quiet, and you shall talk to me absolutely about what you please."

"In that case, dear," said Mrs. Redwood, "let us talk about this Me which seems to be such a trouble to you."

"No, no," cried the girl. "I am sick of Me. Talk about your own thoughts, darling. Your own affairs. Tell me about—George."

She pronounced the name with a certain reluctance. There had been a little extra coolness and stand-offishness between her and George of late, and she was not quite certain that she liked him as much as she had been used to.

"My darling," said the widow. "You don't know how happy it makes me to know that he's coming home. I think he's the best son in the world. I hear other mothers say that their boys are a trouble to them. George never gave me a trouble in his life."

"He would have been a very worthless person if he had," the girl declared.

"Listen," cried Mrs. Redwood. "There is the train. Do you hear it?"

A softened sound, like the sigh of a distant wind, was audible in the stillness of the evening. It grew nearer and louder, swelled into a muffled roar and faded away again. They listened, clinging to each other, and the mother even trembled a little in her eagerness.

"He will be here in ten minutes now," she said; "in five if he takes a fly."

"Then," said Miss Hetheridge, "it is time for me to go. You will have a hundred things to talk about, and I must not be in your way."

Mrs. Redwood would not hear of this, and after much persuasion the girl consented to stay for a little while. The friendly altercation between them was scarcely over when the sound of wheels was heard at the outer gate, and the mother ran into the hall and opened the door to welcome her son.

"You can spare your jaw, my friend," said a manly voice outside. "There's one and a kick—a tanner more than you've any right to. And now fly, like the moon-eyed seraph of dismay."

A hoarse voice was heard in exclamation, but the gate clicked, and in a second or two the stalwart youngster came marching up the pathway with a big portmanteau on his shoulder. He dropped it in the hall and embraced his mother in both arms.

"All right, you dear old lady?" he asked as he kissed her.

"Quite right, George."

"That's well. Why, there's somebody else here. Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Hetheridge. I didn't make you out at first in the dusk." His voice changed from a tone of affectionate jollity to one of extremest frigid politeness.

"How do you do, Mr. Redwood?" said the girl, accepting his proffered hand.

"How do you do, Miss Hetheridge?" he responded.

His mother led him toward the room she had just quitted, and he made an effort to return to his former unconstrained and natural manner.

"Is all this gloom especially prepared for my arrival?" he asked, laughingly, "or have I brought it with me?"

"Ellice and I have been talking in the twilight," his mother answered as she rang the bell.

A maid brought in a lamp in answer to this summons.

"Good-evening, Master George. Glad to see you back again, sir, and looking so healthy, tew."

"Thank you, Mary," said George. "Get Jack to carry my portmanteau upstairs, will you? And now, mother, let me have a look at you."

He took her hands in his and they stood smiling affectionately at one another for half a minute. Suddenly the expression in her face changed and a faint hint of pain and bewilderment crossed her features.

"Why," cried George. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," his mother answered. "Nothing. You grow more like your poor dear father every time I see you. The likeness is simply wonderful. It almost frightened me just now."

The similarity was indeed remarkable and unusual. Had George Redwood the elder lived he would doubtless by this time have been a little grizzled and furrowed, and the likeness between father and son would have been less striking than it seemed now to the widow's eyes and memory. But as it was, the lover of her youth seemed to stand smiling and blooming there before her in the person of his son. The same mould of feature to a line, the same fresh complexion, the same frank and kindly eye; the well-modelled clean-shaven lip and chin, the same; the very little bit of black side whisker George Redwood the elder had worn, the same.

The three sat down and talked of many things, mainly pertaining to George's past and future. The

stiffness which had marked the first greeting of the young people wore away somewhat, though they were still a trifle more punctilious than acquaintances of such long standing had any real need to be. The evening wore away apace, and when at last the girl consulted her watch she started with a humorous pretence of horror.

"Do you know," she exclaimed, "it is nearly ten o'clock? That is all very well for you dwellers in towns, Mr. Redwood, but only the birds of night are abroad in Wellsted at this hour."

"I had no idea," said the widow, "that it was so late. George, you must see Ellice home."

The young lady made some fruitless protest against this proposal, but George was already awaiting with stick and hat in the hall, and she submitted. Whilst they had been talking together in-doors the moon had risen; it was nearly at the full. The skies were clear and the stars winked drowsily in the great placid vault of gloom.

"Shall we take the road or the fields, Miss Hetheridge?" the young man asked.

"Which you please," she answered. Then suddenly and with animation, "the fields. They will be lovely in this moonlight."

The two ways were about equally lengthy and both were devices after the old English country fashion—made in a time when nobody seems to have been in a hurry. It was only the Romans amongst all the people who have inhabited Britain until quite recent days, who seemed to want to go straight to anywhere. They walked in silence for a time and the girl was the first to speak.

"So you are going out into the great world in earnest, Mr. Redwood?"

"Yes," he answered. "I am going into the great world in earnest. There is one thing which I haven't told my mother yet, because I don't want to spoil my last days down here for her. I am going abroad."

"Abroad," she echoed.

"I have made arrangements to go to Liège. I shall be away three years."

"Three years," she echoed again. "That is a long time."

"I suppose," he answered, in a tone of some constraint, "it will not seem long in passing; but do you know, Miss Hetheridge, I have made up my mind to do one thing before I go away."

She thought she read a certain defiance and even anger in his tone.

"Indeed," she asked him, "what may that be, Mr. Redwood?"

"Ah," said George, with a great sigh, "I'm too much of a coward to do it yet. I'm sparing myself, just as I'm sparing my mother. Staving off the evil day."

"I didn't think," said Miss Hetheridge, "that you reckoned cowardice amongst your qualities."

"I don't know that I did either," he answered, gloomily, "but when you can see a paradise on one side and a desert on the other, and when you know you've got to live in one of them and it's about a hundred to one on the desert——"

"Well?" she asked, seeing that he paused.

"Why, it makes a fellow shy of asking which he's sentenced to."

"You choose to be mysterious to-night, Mr. Redwood."

"Look here, Ellice," the young man burst out, pausing suddenly at the first stile they encountered on their way. "I used to call you Ellice. I must have it over, and I may just as well get my *coup de grâce* at once. I've been thinking of it, this year or two, and I must make an end of it."

Miss Hetheridge began to tremble a little, foreboding what was coming, and not as yet being absolutely certain as to whether it were expected or unexpected, dreadful or delightful. She could not prompt him by a

word, and in spite of the desperate resolve he had expressed, he kept silent for what seemed a long time.

"The plain truth of the matter is," he began at length, with unnecessary doggedness, "I'm in love. I'm in love over head and ears. I think I have been ever since I can remember. I know I shall be always."

He paused again, and once more there was a lengthy silence.

"Oh, Ellice," he cried, catching her hand, "Haven't you got a word to say to me?"

Now the young lady had become suddenly enlightened, and had discovered that the position was by no means terrible, though it gave sufficient grounds for tremor.

"What can I have to say in the matter?" she asked.

The young man brushed the futile pretence aside in a second.

"Give me a word, Ellice," he pleaded, drawing her gently toward him. "Only just a word. Tell me that you won't forget me when I'm gone. Tell me I can take away some hope with me."

She answered nothing, but her whole figure yielded to his hand, and he took her in his arms.

## CHAPTER XXI.

ON that same night of clear moonlight, Sam Potter was standing at the gate of his own little garden enjoying a final pipe before turning in. He saw the young couple go by, himself unobserved. Young Redwood held one of the girl's hands in his own, and had an arm about her waist, and in this lover-like fashion, and with his head bent down to look into his sweetheart's face, he went by, unconscious that any eye regarded him. Now Sam had always, in spite of the reticence which he and Matilda thought wise under the circumstances, felt in his own mind that he had a kind of fatherly proprietary right over Bob Martin's little girl. For the child's own sake he had waived his claim all these years, and it had long since been practically obliterated. Still it existed as a sentiment, and when Sam beheld young Redwood in the moonlight in the attitude of an accepted wooer, he thought he had a right to be interested in the matter. If he had had to choose amongst all the young gentlemen of Wellsted and its neighborhood a life partner for the girl nobody but young Redwood, as it happened, would have stood a moment's chance. Sam and George had been chums for a full ten years, and Sam had surrendered himself to the young fellow's service with a placid belief in the other's divine authority to rule him, pretty much as any lumbering affectionate Newfoundland or St. Bernard might have done.

Sam was a man of almost universal handiness, and he had spliced broken bats, cleaned guns, repaired and kept in order fishing-tackle, and done a hundred other odd jobs for the young god of his idolatry. Did young



George go shooting, Sam was there to pick up and carry the game—if he went fishing, Sam was at hand with the landing-net, or was prepared to play patience in a punt for a whole day at a stretch. If George at any cricket match within ten miles of Wellsted made a boundary hit or a brilliant catch, Sam was there to shout enthusiastic applause. His own youthful son was daily admonished to follow in the footsteps of young Mr. Redwood.

Sam was still smoking when the successful suitor's returning footsteps sounded in the lane. He walked into the roadway, suffering the garden gate to fall with a noisy click behind him. The happy lover was deep sunk in reverie, but the click of the gate awoke him from his dreams, and he looked up with a friendly recognition of his old companion.

"Hullo, Sam," he said, pausing for a moment, "all well? How's Mrs. Potter, and how's the boy?"

Sam put a hand on each of the young man's shoulders, patted him affectionately, swayed him this way and that, and then shook hands with him in solemn silence.

"Why, Sam," asked Redwood, "what does that mean?"

Sam began to chuckle, and the lad to blush.

"Look here," said Sam, "you might ha' told me, Master George, and not ha' left me found it out by accident."

"Might have told you what, you old duffer?" asked the blushing George, with an unsuccessful pretence of not knowing what was meant.

"I've carried her," said Sam; "God bless your soul, I've carried her in these arms hundreds and hundreds of miles. Hundreds and hundreds of miles I must have carried her. You might have told me, Master George."

"You don't seem to have given me much chance to tell you anything," answered Redwood, making the best of his discomfiture. "The plain truth is, Sam,

that until a quarter of an hour ago there wasn't anything to tell."

"No?" cried Sam, his face wreathed in a smile of delight and astonishment.

"I've meant my mother to have the first news, but you've been lying in ambush, you old black-tracker, and surprised the secret."

"No?" cried Sam, again. "Do you mean to say I'm the first to hear about it? Well, then, I wish you joy with all my heart. Joy with all my heart is what I wish you, Master George. She's an A 1 young lady—that you'll find."

"Sam," interrupted the discovered lover, "I know I can trust you."

"It would be a bit of a pity if you couldn't, wouldn't it?" Sam asked.

"I don't want a word spoken about this matter yet. I am afraid that I have been precipitate. You see"—George boggled a little in his speech and blushed anew—"Mr. Hetheridge hardly knows anything at all about me. I dare say he's forgotten that I'm alive. I haven't seen him since I was a boy. People say he's enormously wealthy, and he may think it's like my cheek to have looked at Miss Hetheridge, though he doesn't seem to take much interest in her himself."

"My word, he don't," said Sam, bitterly.

It was a curious and yet a quite natural fact that Potter, with that dormant memory of his, had the strongest prepossession against Hetheridge. He had groped darkly and unavailingly within the recesses of his own mind for an actual charge against the man countless times, and had never been able to formulate it or to reach near the dimmest intuition of the truth. The only thing he could arrive at was a perplexed and angry certainty that he had some reason for detesting Hetheridge, and that in one way or another it was associated with those mental lapses which he knew himself to have suffered. How, or when, or where Hetheridge had made himself responsible for this injury,

Sam could not tell, but he charged him with it, and was very often disposed to chide his own unreasonableness in doing so. The very name of the man galled him. Hetheridge's treatment of the little Ellice helped to inspire him with a profound misliking and contempt. Sam seemed often to himself to stand on the edge of a discovery, and his own impotence to seize what he felt to be so near was sometimes savagely irritating. He had long since given up the effort to flog his memory into action on this point, for every such attempt had resulted in an agonizing headache, which, on one or two occasions, had lasted for days and days, and had left behind mental symptoms, of which he felt, without understanding them, the danger.

"You'll say nothing, Sam, will you?" Redwood besought him.

"Not a word," Sam answered. "I'd like to tell 'Tilda, but I won't if you say no."

"I'd rather you said nothing for the present, Sam."

"All right," Sam answered. "I'm as quiet as the grave. Good-night, Master George. Lord love you both, I'm glad to know the news, and you may trust me as you would yourself."

They shook hands heartily and parted, Sam to smoke another pipe or two and to consume a quart of cold tea whilst he digested his discovery, and George to lay his news before his mother.

She was delighted, but no whit surprised.

"But you must remember, George," she said, "that Mr. Hetheridge may have other views for her. They say he is rich, even amongst rich men in London. You will always have enough, but you are very poor compared with him; however, we must hope for the best, and perhaps I have some influence with him. I must see Ellice first, and then I will write to Mr. Hetheridge, or perhaps call upon him myself."

George was curious to know what influence his mother might have with Ellice's father, but she would tell him nothing beyond the fact that they had been

playmates in childhood and intimates until the time of his leaving England for Australia. But the boy, like most lovers at this early stage of affairs, was easily hopeful, and after an hour or two of serious and tender talk the mother and son retired to their separate rooms.

In the morning Mrs. Redwood had an interview with Ellice, and when the girl's first shyness was conquered, secured from her a confession of her own attachment for George. "She thought," she said, blushing and trembling in her dearest friend's arms, "that she had always cared for George ever since she could remember." There were a hundred pretty reminiscences exchanged—the mother recalling this and that sign of George's affection, and Ellice confessing to her own fears, her own coldnesses or pretences of coldness, her doubts of George and her fears lest she might be throwing away her heart on one who did not ask for it and would not value it.

At the close of this interview, which afforded the widow as pure a delight as she had known since her great trouble fell upon her, it was decided that Mrs. Redwood should write to Hetheridge saying that she wished to see him upon a matter of grave importance, and asking him to name an early day for a meeting. So said, so done. The letter was written and dispatched that day, and the reply was eagerly awaited by the three people interested in it.

They were not long kept in suspense, for the answer came by return of post. It was brief and to the point.

"MY DEAR MRS. REDWOOD:—I am always entirely at your service, and whenever you choose to send me a line by wire, stating the time of your arrival, I will meet you at the railway station.

"Yours very truly,

"JNO. HETHERIDGE."

"I will wire at once," the widow said to George when she had shown him this letter at the breakfast-table, "and I will go up by the early train."

"Let me come with you," George urged, being willing to learn the result of the negotiations at the earliest possible moment.

His mother had determined to have the arrangement of the whole matter in her own hands, and would not be dissuaded. He was compelled to remain behind, but he accompanied her to the railway station, dispatched the telegram to Hetheridge with his own hand, and saw his mother comfortably bestowed in the carriage in which she was to travel up to London. Then he lounged homeward to wait results, and to find time weigh heavily on his hands.

Hetheridge was at the town terminus according to promise, and Mrs. Redwood was startled by the haggard aspect he presented. The man was worn to skin and bone, and his shoulders had begun to stoop. There were marks of premature age about him everywhere, and his manner was nervous and unhinged. One phase of his aspect was at once striking and difficult to define. Mrs. Redwood noticed it at once, but having no key to its meaning, found it impossible to describe even to herself. It was a look of alarmed expectancy—an expression always furtive, and sometimes almost hidden, but never altogether absent from the face. There was a distinct sense of power in the man, despite his physical falling off. He had grown to have the look of one who is accustomed to find his word obeyed, and his manner had lost the rustic touches which had once belonged to it. She had only seen him once or twice since her refusal of his hand, and the changes in him inspired her with a sense of pity, not unmingled with esteem, and even a little touch of fear.

He received her with a respectful cordiality, and led her to a well-appointed carriage which awaited him in the street.

"My time is not my own, Mrs. Redwood," he said, as he took his seat beside her, "and if you will allow me I will drive you to my place of business. Mind," he added, "I am quite at your disposal so long as you

may need me, but as soon as you release me I have to be at the disposal of others whom I am much less willing to oblige."

He laughed nervously as he spoke, drummed for a little while with the finger of a gloved hand upon his knee and suddenly looked backward over his shoulder with a gaze of startled horror. She caught the look and was fairly frightened by it, and he, noticing her discomfiture a moment later, explained to her with a ghastly gayety.

"I have grown as nervous as a cat of late years. I am overworked, and I live too much alone. The slightest noise jars my nerves. I have made a very great deal of money, and I hear constantly there are people who envy me. You may believe me when I tell you, Mrs. Redwood, that I am not a man to be envied."

She pitied him from the bottom of her heart, and even found much in his altered manner which impressed her, and forced her, against herself, to admire him. He wore his new state so well, sat so naturally in his splendidly appointed carriage, and had so much the air of a man of the world, that the inward changes in him seemed more remarkable than the outward. He seemed to unbend a little to her, as if of late years he had been in the habit of meeting people to whom he could dictate.

"I hope," he said by and by, "that all is well with you at home. Your little boy must have grown into a man by this time."

"Yes," she answered, "everything goes very smoothly. Heaven has sent me my share of trouble, and thinks perhaps that I have a right to quiet. George is quite a man now, and as good a son as heart could wish. It is about him that I wish to speak to you."

"In whatever I can do," he answered, "you may command me, Ellice."

His employment of her Christian name affected her,

and seemed to bring her closer to the friend and companion of her childhood. They were both in middle age, and his cares and sufferings seemed to make him twenty years older than he was. She took the name as a sign of friendship, and was pleased and gratified by his use of it.

"I hope," she said, with a faint and troubled smile, for she was naturally anxious about her enterprise, "I hope that you will not change your mind when you come to know what I have to ask for him?"

"I think that unlikely," he responded, and fell again to drumming upon his knee. Suddenly he turned and looked again with that inexplicable glance of terror across his own shoulder. She was thoughtfully regarding him at the moment, and the expression of his face, though it was as fugitive as lightning, caused her to recoil.

"Nerves," he said, gloomily. "My nerves are a sad trouble to me. My life has been too lonely, Ellice. I dread the future which lies before me."

She pitied him more and more, and after regarding him for a silent minute or two she laid a timid hand upon his arm.

"Why work so hard?" she asked. "Why give yourself so much trouble to heap up needless wealth?"

"You think I care for money?" he demanded with a weary bitterness. "Not I. I have had more for years past than I could ever spend or use, but if I dropped out of business I should die. There is nothing else to fill my life. Beyond my business, which is no more to me than brandy is to a drunkard, I have no purpose in the world."

"You have your child, John," she urged, still turning toward him, and once more laying her hand upon his arm.

"My child," he answered. "*My* child. Oh, yes, I have the child."

They were driven for a few minutes in silence. The carriage stopped in a retired city street and he alighted,

offering her his arm. He led her up a flight of stairs, into a room where a couple of chattering clerks froze into instant silence at the sight of him, through another room where a grave responsible-looking man sat at a knee-table, heaped with papers, and into a third room furnished with official luxury, where he placed a seat for her.

He set his hat upon the table and drew off his gloves, thoughtfully pausing once, and once only, to stare across his shoulder with that startled look which was already growing familiar to Mrs. Redwood. Then he moved to the door by which he had entered and half opening it, addressed the responsible-looking man in the next apartment.

"You understand, Jessamer? I am on no account—on no account to be disturbed until I ring." He closed the door and turned. "Now, Mrs. Redwood, I am altogether at your disposal." He seated himself at some little distance from her, and with a natural tremor she began to unfold the purpose of her visit.

"I don't think you have seen much of your daughter for some years past."

"No," he answered, "I have not. You mustn't think me altogether insensible, but I have very little in common with a mere child like her, and I could do nothing but cloud her life if I brought her closer to me. I am a gloomy man, Ellice. I have never had a real purpose which has not been defeated. While I have seemed to succeed I have made my bitterest failure, and the things in which I have really succeeded are the things I never cared for. Money!" he cried, with a bitter abruptness, "money! What is money? What is money to a man who broke the mainspring of his life so many years ago? What is money to the man who finds the one desire of life denied him?"

She guessed at no hidden meaning in the words.

"I am sorry you are not happy," she returned.

"Happy," he interjected in a tone so anguished and despairing that it half frightened her. "Go on," he



added. "Take no notice of my whims and moods. Tell me what I can do for you."

"Your daughter," she proceeded, "is growing into a woman. She is a dear, good girl, John. No one in the world knows her so well, or half so well, as I do, and I love her as if she were my own."

"Yes, yes," he answered, half impatiently. "She writes me so. Half her letters are in praise of you. Can I guess, I wonder, what you are going to tell me?"

"She and George," pursued the widow, "have been brought up together from the time when she was seven years of age. They have been like brother and sister. Perhaps I ought to have kept them more apart."

"No," he said, "I hoped this, and more than half expected it."

"You hoped for it, John," she cried, rising and moving a single step toward him. "You know that they have learned to love each other."

"I guessed they would," he answered, "and I hoped they would."

"George should not have spoken, perhaps," she hurried on, "without waiting for your permission, in fact I know that he should not. But he is very young and ardent, and if he acted indiscreetly he meant no wrong. I am sure he will try to make her happy. I have spoken to both of them, and they love each other dearly."

He sat before her with bent head, and with his hands clasped together between his knees.

"Who guarantees my happiness?" he cried, sardonically, and then suddenly rising he confronted her. "Do you remember, Ellice, how many years Jacob worked and waited for Laban's daughter? Fourteen was it? I've more than doubled that. I shall be fifty in nine months from now, and I've loved you all my life. Do you care about that boy of yours?" She made no answer, but stood half frightened at the underlying vehemence of his manner. He was quiet enough on the outside, but his eyes blazed and his hands shook

with suppressed excitement. "Come now, you care about him. He's like the apple of your eye to you."

"I love him better than my life," she answered.

"And you wish his happiness?"

"With all my heart."

"And you think his only way to be happy lies in this match?"

"I know his heart is set upon it."

"Very well," he said, "you shall have your own way on one condition. Consider me a little, Ellice. I have waited all my life. You have been free again this sixteen years. I haven't pestered you with beseechings. I have only written now and again to ask if you could find no relenting for me. No woman ever had a truer servant. No man ever waited more patiently. No man ever waited longer or suffered more. You don't guess what I've suffered or what I shall suffer till the day I die."

Save for that underlying vehemence which made his speech almost terrible to her, his manner was calm and self-controlled. The words sounded exaggerated and even wild. But after all they might be true, and even a half belief in their truth made the man's case seem pitiful.

"Think what you ask me for," she urged him. "What heart have I to offer anybody? We are both getting old, John."

"Well," he answered, "I put no constraint upon you. I have wondered if this day would come, and have hoped for it this half-dozen years. It gives me the only hold I ever had upon you. Say yes to me, Ellice, and I give my consent. Say no, and I withhold it. Don't speak yet. Don't try to answer me at all to-day. Go home and think about it. If you consent everything shall go to the boy and girl when I am gone. If not I shall found a hospital."

She had resumed her seat and sat there pale and trembling.

"Let me give you a glass of wine," he said, "and

then I will lead you to the carriage. It is at your disposal for the day."

Scarcely knowing what she did she sipped the wine he proffered her and rose to go.

"You will let me have an answer in a week?" he inquired.

"Yes," she answered, "I will write within a week."

He escorted her into the street, placed her in the carriage, and gave the coachman instructions to obey her orders. She drove straight to the railway station, and there, having dismissed the coachman, dispatched a telegraphic message to her son.

"He accepts."

In those two words she expressed her own sacrifice.

## CHAPTER XXII.

ALL through the time of waiting for the train, and during the three hours occupied by the journey, Mrs. Redwood's mind was filled by a resolute pretence that she did not regret the decision so hastily arrived at. This bit of feminine self-deceit had a basis of reality. She loved her son with an intense and passionate devotion, and next to him in her affection stood the girl he had chosen for his wife. For their sakes she was willing to sacrifice everything. Whilst she looked at their side of the bargain she was eminently satisfied, but she had to shut her eyes to the contract which she herself had signed in the dispatch of the telegram to George. The years which had flown away since the days when John Hetheridge—always unwelcome as a wooer—had come doggedly and wrathfully courting her, had certainly not made him seem less impossible as a husband. The father of her boy had long ago taken the complexion of saint and martyr in her mind, and to put him in a place of sanctity and to adopt the attitude of a worshipper, she had never had need to go through those mental gymnastics which lead to the solace of so many widowed women. The dead George had really been almost an ideal husband. He had loved her faithfully and tenderly, and his affection had stood the strain of marriage. He had never wearied of her or she of him, and in the whole course of their married life he had never given her an unkind word. As faithful women will, she cherished the memory of his negative and positive virtues. She had always thought him a king amongst men, and now, except in her own boy, he had no peer in the world. It was natural—in a woman of her temperament it was in-

evitable. She had always looked with extreme distaste on the mere thought of a second marriage, and at the time of Hetheridge's former proposal to her she had shrunk from it as from a sacrilege to the dead. Had she herself been alone concerned there is hardly any extremity conceivable to which she would rather not have submitted than this. But all the world over women show this astonishing trait of character—give them an opportunity to be miserable for the sake of securing happiness to anybody they really love, and they will seize it as avidly as a man will seize his own selfish pleasure. If the sacrifice she was making had not caused her the intensest pain, it could have yielded no such satisfaction as it afforded her. She found a delight in her own agonized repulsion, because it was endured for her dead husband's child—the child she had borne and suckled and tended, and who at last had taken the place of her husband in her heart. Had her sufferings been less than they were, they would have seemed unworthy of him.

Woman is not merely a paradox, she is a congregation of paradoxes. The theme is old, and thousands and thousands of voices have chanted it; but there is nothing in the wide world so altogether holy and splendid as maternal love. The one thing next sacred to it, but infinitely less common, is the reverential worship and whole-hearted sacrifice which widowed love can offer to the vanished object of it. Only a woman could have slain the second to serve it as a burnt-offering on the altar of the first.

George met her at the Wellsted railway station and embraced her publicly. He pressed her for a history of the interview, and that, of course, his mother would not and could not give. She had resolved on a pious deceit already. George should never guess, if she could help it, that her coming marriage was in any way associated with the securing of Hetheridge's consent. It should look like an independent transaction, and should have all the appearance of being entered

into of her own free will. She wrote to Hetheridge to that express effect next day:

"Dear Mr. Hetheridge," the letter ran, "I have been thinking very anxiously over what you said to me the day before yesterday, and I have come to think that it would not be right in me to stand in the way of my son's happiness. I had never meant to marry again, and I am honestly afraid that you will find me a bad bargain, though I shall try to do my duty. I must tell you one thing, for that is more in my mind than all the rest, George must never be allowed to think that my marriage has anything whatever to do with his. If he thought that he would be very unhappy. I know this seems to say that I accept your offer for his sake and not for yours or mine. Dear friend, I should be sorry to pain you, but this is the truth and it is best, oh, far best, that you should know it. I will do as you wish, but I could never bear deceit, and if we are to be barely comfortable with each other, we shall have to understand one another plainly from the beginning. I know this is not such a letter as you would wish to have, but I cannot write otherwise. I hope that your health is good. I have seen your daughter, and your consent has made her very happy. I am sure they love each other dearly. No more at present from yours respectfully, Ellice Redwood."

Before this letter was dispatched, George had naturally seen Ellice and had conveyed to her the glorious tidings, little dreaming at what a sacrifice his own happiness was being bought. The girl queened it, in her own way, in the house of the Rev. Jordan Farrell. She had the daintiest and most luxurious little boudoir imaginable, and her private parlor for the reception of her friends. The rest of the establishment was rather gaunt in aspect, the reverend gentleman's ideas being severely ecclesiastical even as to the furnishing of the domestic interior. The hall with its cold shining oil-cloth, its clerical hat stand, and the chill polish of its

square-cut mahogany chairs, gave the visitor the impression of the vestibule to a chapel of little ease, and the library and drawing-room were yawning deserts of uncompromising leather and hard wood. The lamps were all of the church pattern and of beaten brass, and the salver on which a visitor's card was presented was like the plate employed at church collections. Ellice's rooms were in absolute contrast to the frozen formality of the house. Hetheridge's unrestrained hand had provided money in abundance, and the girl's own taste had done all the rest. *A chaque oiseau, son nid est beau.* But Ellice had a genuine right to be proud of her own nest, and her lover, who since the days of early boyhood had never been privileged to visit it, thought quite properly and naturally that he had seen no apartment in his life so charming. The perfume of his sweetheart's presence seemed to exhale from everything in this delightful little room, and whilst he awaited the arrival of its mistress, he inspected it with a sort of awe and reverence. In the middle of his examination Ellice entered, all smiles and blushes.

"I have news," said George, rejoicingly. "My mother has been to London and came back an hour ago. She has seen your father, and Ellice, what do you think?"

He had begun so beamingly that his attempt to draw a long face now and to adopt a tone of misery was comically inept and undeceptive.

"What am I to think?" she asked.

"You are to think," said George, "that I am the luckiest, happiest fellow in the whole wide world, and that you are the dearest girl."

"I trust," said the dearest girl, "that I shall always have the sense, in certain cases, to do as I am told. Since I *am* to think those things, I will try to think them. Papa consents?"

"He consents!"

"This is ominous," she said, gayly. "The course of true love never did run smooth."

"Perhaps it has done once or twice," George urged, laughing. "Perhaps we may be the exception which proves the rule."

They sat down side by side, and George possessing himself of her hand, talked of his hopes and plans.

"You see, dear," he began, "my mother has done everything for me already that I can reasonably ask or expect, and in point of fact, a good deal more. I must go out into the world and make my way."

"You are not going to that horrid Belgium, now, George?" cried the girl.

"I must, dear," he answered. "I must make a career for myself, and must earn my own living. You see, I've been studying for years for my profession. With a year's practical experience at the works I shall pass easily, and after that I shall begin to draw a salary, not a big one, but enough to marry on and to keep house in a quiet way. Your father is a business man, and would be likely, I fancy, to have pretty strong objections to a loafer. He shan't have any complaint against me on that ground."

She admired him, of course, for his determination, but none the less, the prospect of separation looked comfortless. The course of true love had its cross-currents already, it seemed, but neither of them guessed into what stormy waters the stream would drift them in a little while.

"A year will soon go by," he said, trying to comfort her, for she made no secret of her grief at parting from him. "We shall write to each other constantly, and as soon as I can offer you a home I shall come back and claim you. I made an engagement for to-night a week ago, long before I even thought that I should find the courage to speak to you. I have to dine with old Dom to-night, and I shall have to leave you very soon. You will let me call early to-morrow won't you?"

"You have no right to go away now," she answered; "but I will spare you to Monsieur Dom for this even-



ing only. I have always liked Monsieur Dom," she added. "Can you guess why?"

"He's an uncommonly jolly, good old fellow," said George, "a delightful old fellow. Perhaps that may have something to do with it."

"Something, perhaps, but that is not my reason. Can't you guess? My reason for liking Monsieur Dom is that he likes you."

"And my reason for liking him," said George, "or one of my reasons, is that he likes you. Do you know, Ellice, the old boy is quite fond of you?"

"I know that," the girl said, rather gravely. "But do you know, I find him a little strange. You mustn't think it a fancy of mine, for I've seen it over and over again, and even watched for it. He looks at me in the most curious way, as if he were sorry for me somehow, and in his manner I notice the same thing—a sort of pitying tenderness, as if he were afraid to hurt me. I have often thought that perhaps I am like somebody he cared for. Is that too romantic? Monsieur Dom is an old bachelor, but he's too tender-hearted not to have cared for somebody, and I may remind him of her."

"I've noticed the same thing," said George. "I wonder if you're right. But I can't fancy old Dom in love."

"He wasn't always old Dom," the girl protested. "He was young Dom once. We shall be old ourselves some day, and I dare say young people will wonder if we ever had romance. It is romantic to be engaged, George, isn't it?"

"Not at all romantic," George declared. "It was delightful, satisfactory in the most eminent degree, but, thank heaven, matter of fact. They had a laughing wrangle over this theme, and finally George departed, having taken leave a score of times, or thereabouts, as if he were starting on an immediate journey in search of the North Pole."

Dom was at home and waiting when the young fellow arrived. The old Frenchman's russet-pippin face

was prodigiously wrinkled by this time, and his huge mustache and beetling eyebrows were snow-white. His brown eyes sparkled still with all the fire and vivacity of youth, and his gestures were as vivid and superabundant as ever.

"My young friend," he cried, seizing his visitor by both hands. "You come in time to rescue me from the profoundest abyss of despair. The *filet de sole aux champignons*, is mine, the work of these hands that now clasp your arm. I had feared its ruin. Had you been five minutes later it would have been a total wreck. Sit down. Let us be in a hurry with the soup. That is my housekeeper's handiwork and has no touch of genius in it."

Monsieur Dom had prepared an excellent repast, and was a rare judge of wine as an old and expert *vigneron* like himself surely had a right to be.

"This is not so bad," he said, laying a caressing hand on a black bottle which bore signs of age upon it, "but there is something better for after dinner. You shall taste the best claret of your life-time. I tell you that—I, André Dom—and you may rely upon my verdict."

"I am ready for it," George avowed, "and I will drink a health in it which shall be worthy of the finest vintage sun ever ripened."

"Oh," cried Monsieur Dom, twinkling and beaming across the white napery and sparkling glass of the little table. "The cat jumps so! That is how the land lies. Aha, Master Redwood, we are of an age for these enthusiasms! Not? And who is *la belle*?" He began to sing and snap his fingers. "*La belle, la belle, jeune, fraîche, fidèle!*"

"I'll tell you what it is," said George, gayly. "You seem to know a lot more about this sort of thing than is altogether befitting in a person of your years."

"Ah!" said Dom, with sudden sentiment, "I was not always a gentleman of my years. I remember, my young friend, I remember."

"Come now," said George. "What do you remember?"

"I remember," returned Monsieur Dom, "to have been told that there is no fool like an old fool. My age shall not be sentimental for the exhilaration of your youth. But I have been a gay dog in my time, my young friend, and that is, perhaps, why I am sometimes a sad dog now."

When the meal was over, the housekeeper cleared the table, and the two sat down to taste that special vintage of which the host had spoken. Monsieur Dom himself uncorked the cobwebbed bottle with exaggerated care, handling it as tenderly in its wicker cradle as if it had been an infant. The cork came out with a satisfying "kloop," and the old man, with many nods and winks of approval, examined it, sniffed at it, and handed it over for his companion's inspection.

"That cork," he said, triumphantly, "has enjoyed this delicious imprisonment for twenty years. Now you shall taste a wine. I grew this grape myself for my old patron, the Marquis Leroux. The wine was made under my own eye. I know it. You shall say it is worthy of your toast." He polished the wine-glasses with a table napkin, wiped the neck of the bottle with extreme care, and then poured out the precious vintage.

"I rise," said Redwood, "to do honor alike to the toast and the wine."

The two stood facing each other, each glass in hand, and each smiling. Dom shook his head waggishly, and his smile was full of a harmless and friendly mockery. The lad lushed, but met his companion's eye with courage.

"Come," said Dom, "reveal the name. Why should I drink the lady's health in ignorance?"

"Shall I?" asked George, blushing still more pronouncedly.

"You shall," said Dom, "if you will. Come, why not? Eh?"

"Well," cried George, the blush deepening into scarlet, with the consciousness that he was growing sheepish under the laughing raillery of the old man's gaze. "Here goes, I drink to the health of my plighted wife."

"No?" cried Dom, ecstatically. "Is that true? Give me your hand, my dear young George. My admirable young friend, I congratulate you."

Each transferred his glass to the left hand, and they clasped hands across the table.

"I will drink to this toast," said Dom, "with all my heart. Who is the lady?"

"Miss Ellice Hetheridge," said George, and to his profound amazement, the glass dropped from Dom's hand to the floor, where it shattered into fragments. The old man lurched forward and clutched the table. The precious bottle fell and crashed unheeded.

"No, no," said Dom, so strangely agitated that the words escaped him only in a hoarse whisper. "It is too impossible, too horrible!"

George Redwood stood for a moment like a man who had received a crushing blow, and then mechanically moving toward the mantel-piece, set down his glass and turned to stare at Dom with an aspect so stricken and amazed that the old Frenchman repented himself bitterly of his unguarded precipitancy.

"Are you mad?" George found tongue to ask at length.

"Ah, my young friend," cried Dom, in a distress so real that Redwood, shaken and astonished as he was, was compelled to believe in it. "What shall I say to you? How shall I escape from what you have heard?"

"Horrible?" George questioned to himself. "Impossible. What do you mean?" he demanded, with an angry stride toward his host.

"My dear George," answered Dom. "My dear young Redwood, I am desolate. I cannot tell you anything. It would not be right or just to tell you anything. I have been blind," he cried, wringing his hands above his head, and tramping to and fro through

the spilt wine and crackling splinters of glass. "I should have tried to stop this years ago."

George seized him by the shoulder, clutching him in his agitation, more roughly than he knew, and bringing him to a stand-still.

"Why should you have tried to stop it years ago?" he asked. "You mean something. What do you mean?"

There was no conviction clearer in the world, no conviction more impossible to escape from than that which had dominated the Frenchman's mind for years. The false André Dom had been the murderer of George Redwood, and John Hetheridge was the false André Dom. This belief had taken unconscious root in his mind, and he had nourished it until it had grown to be ineradicable. He had admitted always that he could prove nothing but that fact, yet this had never in the faintest degree shaken his sense of right to his own suspicion. That young Redwood, to whom he had played the part of philosopher and friend for seven or eight years, and whom he had learned to love, should have pledged himself to marry the daughter of his father's murderer was nothing less than appalling. His suspicion had grown into certainty—for him—and it was upon the uncontrollable impulse of that certainty that he had spoken. Yet he knew of nothing which could carry conviction to another mind. All these considerations passed like lightning through his thoughts. He saw an intolerable tragedy before him and was powerless to avert it. He stood in an impotent silence, vainly searching for a way of escape.

"Unless you are mad," George said, sternly, "you mean something. Tell me what you mean."

"My dearest boy," Dom stammered, miserably, "I can tell you nothing. Nothing. I was a miserable fool to speak, and yet I could not help it. I am not mad. I had a reason, and a dreadful reason. Do not, I beg of you, hurry into this marriage."

"Do you dare," George asked him, gripping him yet more tightly, "to breathe a word against her?"

"Against her?" Dom answered in aggrieved amaze. "Never! Not a word. She is as spotless as an angel. As pure as snow."

"Then tell me," George demanded, with a chalky face and blazing eyes. "Tell me what you mean."

"She is not to blame," Dom answered, looking up at his guest with a glimmer of tears in his eyes. "And you are not to blame. You should know, dear youth, that I love you well. I have tried many times to show it. And I tell you—I dare to tell you this, that for your father's son to marry her father's daughter is a thing incredible, intolerable, horrible."

"Come," said George, shaking him a little in his grasp. "You have gone too far to go back now. Tell me why."

"I cannot tell you why," Dom answered in a wild and quivering voice, "I have no right to tell you why. There is a bar between you, and, sooner than leap it, if you knew what it was, you would burn your right hand in the fire. Sooner than leap that bar you would see her burn her own hand. You would rather carry her to her grave than do it."

Redwood released him, dropped his hands, and then hid his face in them for a moment, but only for a moment. He looked up again, straining his hands across his brows with the action of a swimmer newly emerged from water.

"Dom," he said, "I must know more of this."

"I can tell you no more," Dom responded, doggedly. "I dare not have told you less. Your life, dear youth, is in your own hands. I have told you the truth as I believe it. You must do what you will. What you must. You will hate me always now, and for that I shall be sorry, very sorry, but I cannot help it."

Redwood glared at him for awhile in silence, and turning suddenly from him, walked out of the room and out of the house. He wandered for hours about the fields, a prey to alternate anger and bewilderment; but think as he would he could find no key to the meaning of the extraordinary scene which lay behind him.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

THE more Redwood strove to solve the mystery afforded by the problem of Dom's behavior, the more insoluble it appeared, and at last—and after no prolonged interval either—he set it resolutely on one side and determined to be troubled by it no longer. This was much easier to determine than to effect, and a thousand times, even in Ellice's presence, it returned to him and troubled him with a nervous chill and hesitation to which he was altogether unaccustomed. In spite of himself he hovered between two opinions, neither of which seemed to carry any real warrant of belief. The first of these was that Dom was mad, and this theory, in view of the perfect sanity of the old man's ordinary behavior, seemed scarcely to hold water. The second was that there was really some dreadful barrier between Ellice and himself, which if he could but realize its existence, would hold them apart forever. Against this, not only his intellect, but his heart stood in revolt. The thing was not merely impossible—it was absurd to the furthest limits of monstrosity. All the same it set, and could not fail to set, a something impalpable yet cold between them. A pane of ice through which they could see and hear each other, but which forbade them to embrace heart to heart as they had so newly and so sweetly learned to do.

The girl could not fail to notice an alteration in her lover's manner, but she was too young and ardent in love to doubt the one excuse he offered. His going away depressed him, so he said invariably when she found him distraught in manner and reproached him with it.

"I am not often fanciful," he told her once. "I

used to think I was a very matter-of-fact fellow. Perhaps my having found such a treasure and having to leave it behind, and being afraid to lose it, may make a difference to me. But tell me this one thing, my darling: If anything should ever come between us, and I should lose the right to hold you in my arms, as I do now, tell me that I shan't lose your love. Promise at least to love me always."

"Why, George," she answered, in some amazement. "What should come between us? What can come between us?"

He was almost the last man in the world from whom this superstitious kind of boding might have been expected, but then of course there was a romantic soothing in the reflection that it was his love for her which had so altered him, and that his sense of her value inspired him with such fear of losing her.

Ellice for years past had been accustomed to come and go without ceremony in Mrs. Redwood's house, and her engagement to George made but slight difference. She stayed away sometimes from shyness when she would otherwise have gone; but in her rarer visits now she went in and out without announcement or formality, as she had been used to do from a time which looked to her young fancy immemorial.

On a July afternoon, when the little town seemed to sleep and bask in the broad sunlight, Ellice walked through the gateway into Mrs. Redwood's garden. The air was heavy and almost sickly with the breathless perfume of the tea-roses, the jessamine and the southernwood. The house was silent, and with its blinds drawn against the sun looked tenantless. A foreboding of disaster, which came she knew not why, and passed she knew not wherefore, touched her like a breath and vanished. She walked round to the other side of the house, and came upon the little lawn, whose triple-pile velvet gave no answer to her footsteps. There was a trellised porch with ivy and Virginia creeper trailing over it, setting French windows in a



frame of green. Here and there a white star of jessamine glimmered in the thick-growing foliage, and Ellice had paused to pluck a blossom or two, when the sound of subdued weeping reached her ears. She darted into the room at once, and there sat Mrs. Redwood alone, and crying bitterly, but restrainedly, with her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Mamma, dear," cried Ellice, kneeling beside her and twining her arms about her waist. "What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, dear," Mrs. Redwood answered. "Nothing. I am very foolish; I shall be better directly."

"No," Ellice protested, "it is something and something very serious. You are not one of those people who cry for nothing."

The simple truth was that the widow had been thinking of the long-vanished George, and had been tormenting herself with thoughts of faithlessness to him, until her tears could be controlled no longer. That her own life lay before her stale, profitless, and even painful, mattered little. The harvest she desired to reap was not her own. If her son's granary be full what could her own poverty matter to anybody? But the vanished George, lost to everybody else in the world, and almost forgotten, was still alive to her, and the loving sacrilege she threatened wounded that dear idol, so that she could hardly bear to look on her own handiwork. She felt that all this was hypersensitive and foolish, but that gave her no escape from it.

Ellice cooed sympathetic inquiry in her ear—sympathy with just a *soupeçon* of curiosity in it, after the manner of women—and when she had controlled herself a little, Mrs. Redwood answered:

"I am not quite well to-day, my dear, and George will be leaving me very soon."

"Only for a year, mamma, dear," said Ellice.

"Only a year from you," the widow answered, not quite ingenuously, "but he goes away from me this time for good and all."

"Don't say that, mamma," the girl besought her. "You don't think I shall ever come between you."

"You can't help that," Mrs. Redwood answered, with a tearful smile. And women are so made, even good women, that they can change the venue of an emotion and still retain the sentiment. The best of them has this odd faculty, and it is one of the most dangerous foibles of the worst. Mrs. Redwood had cried in solitude for the reasons already given. But the girl was not to know that, and the widow wept in company for a reason discovered on the spur of the moment absolutely novel, yet quite real, if not as poignant as the first. These deceptions in women are not immoral. The man who practised them would become contemptible, but in the woman they are not merely natural, but are not to be escaped from. Nobody has a right to review them from the masculine standpoint.

"I can't help coming in between you and George, mamma?" Ellice asked, solicitously. "I hope you don't think that; I hope you don't mean it."

"My dear," returned the widow, drying her eyes as she spoke. "That's in the course of nature, and you mustn't think that I complain of it. But when a son marries, his mother loses him. It's written so, Ellice. 'He shall leave father and mother, and cleave unto his wife.' I hope he'll make you happy and that you will make him happy, and if that's the case I'm sure I shall have nothing to cry for."

She tried to smile again with better result than at first, and by and by, with the self-sacrificing dissimulation of her sex, pretended to be quite herself, and to treat her cares as a mere result of nervous depression. Ellice professed to accept her statement, but thought in her inmost heart that there was something more serious.

The discovery of the fact that she was in trouble set Mrs. Redwood on her guard, and especially in George's presence, she was careful to put a bright face on

things. But Ellice had communicated her fears to George, and he had grown anxiously watchful. It was possible for her to show a placid and even a smiling countenance throughout the day, and in spite of his watchfulness his mother deceived him for a time, but the traces of the silent tears she shed at night began in a while to be evident in the day-time, and his affection gave him penetration enough to see that she had some serious trouble. Dom's outburst, extravagant as it had seemed, had made an impression upon him, and there were times when he felt as if that dreadful barrier of which the little Frenchman had spoken might exist in reality. He began to ask himself now, if his mother could possibly be aware of it, and if that were the cause of the anxiety which so evidently weighed upon her. It was not easy to question her on that theme, and more than once, the inquiry which trembled on his lips was allowed to remain unspoken.

He had had no intercourse with Dom for a fortnight, and was resolute to hold no further parley with him, but this matter was not left entirely in his own hands. He was strolling home after an interview with Ellice, recalling as he sauntered through the scented summer dusk, every word, and look, and gesture of his sweetheart when the Frenchman suddenly confronted him. He had been sitting solitary on a stile by the wayside, and George thought it not unlikely that he had been waited for. He made a movement to evade his old companion, but Dom would not be forbidden and laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

"My dear young friend," said Dom, in a voice of some emotion, "you have thought me a meddlesome madman already, and you are angry with me. I wish it were not so. I would rather do anything in the world than cause you pain."

"Look here, Monsieur Dom," Redwood answered, "I've thought the matter over pretty carefully, and I've come to this conclusion. Either you have no earthly right to speak as you did when I dined with

you, or I have an absolute right to know on what grounds you spoke."

"If I could tell you, if I had a right to tell you," Dom declared, "I would not keep you in ignorance of the truth for a moment."

George made an angry and impatient movement, but Dom's hand had tightened on his sleeve, and without actual violence he could not free himself.

"You must not go," cried Dom; "you shall not go till I have discharged my conscience. Tell me one thing. This story of your mother's marriage—is it true?"

"Story of my mother's marriage!" Redwood answered in a tone of incredulous scorn and wonder. "Oh, my word, Monsieur Dom, you ought to be taken care of."

"It is not true!" cried Dom; "it is not true! You are positive, upon your soul, it is not true?"

"Yes," said Redwood, in a tone of weary patience. "I am positively certain, upon my soul, it is not true."

"Then," cried Dom, "it is your business to contradict it."

"My dear sir," George responded, "I have contradicted it. I am in the act of contradicting it. If there is any such story afoot it is a foolish, groundless publication. And even if it were not what it is you must let me ask you——"

"What business it is of mine?" Dom interrupted. "You have a right to ask, and I can only tell you that in my position there is not a man alive who would not make it his business."

"You'll understand me, Monsieur Dom," George answered, feeling more and more sorrowfully assured in his own mind that Dom's intellect was deranged, "you'll understand me when I say that unless you show me some real grounds for the curious line of conduct you are now pursuing, I must decline to talk to you again."

"My poor young friend," Dom said, taking him by the other sleeve, and confronting him face to face. "I tell you that I am the possessor of a terrible secret, and that I dare not yet reveal it. I tell you, if ever you come to know my secret you will thank me from your soul for having interfered between you and your hopes of happiness."

"This is intolerable," Redwood answered. "Let us see what lies at the root of it all. If you are only a madman, of course it doesn't matter. But what do you mean, to begin with, by coming with this cock-and-bull story of my mother's marriage? Has anybody heard of it except yourself?"

"They were talking of it at the Hall an hour ago," Dom answered. "I could not help but come and ask you of it. I had been to your house and found that you were out. I guessed you would pass this way, and I've waited here since then to meet you."

"Very well," said George, "there's something tangible for me to go on. Will you come with me to the Hall and tell me from whom you got the news?"

"Willingly," Dom answered, releasing his grasp at once.

They set out side by side without another word, and walked in silence along the lane, through the lodge gates, and up the drive. At the entrance to the Hall Dom spoke again.

"It was Mr. Weybridge," he said, "who brought the news. You had better ask him for yourself. I will await you here."

George assenting, entered the house, and in a minute found himself in the presence of Mr. Weybridge, who sat in slippered ease in an afternoon smoking-jacket in the full enjoyment of his nightly cigar.

"Glad to see you, Redwood," he cried. "Take a seat and help yourself to a cigar. You'll find whiskey and seltzer on the sideboard."

"No thank you, sir," George answered, "I won't

sit down. I have just heard a very foolish and distressing rumor, and you are named to me as being the authority of it."

"Oh," cried Weybridge, rising, and staring at him a little. "This is unpleasant, my dear boy. What is the rumor?"

George had grown pale, his breathing was uneven, and his heart beat thickly.

"Do you know of no rumor?" he asked, "affecting my mother and myself?"

"I got a piece of news in town to-day," responded Weybridge, emphasizing the word news as if to repudiate the thought of rumor. "A piece of news which I confess I thought astonishing."

"May I ask its nature?" George demanded.

"Certainly, you may," said Weybridge. "Mr. Hetheridge, who happens to be a fellow-director of mine in an Australian gold company, told me this afternoon that a marriage had been arranged between Mrs. Redwood and himself." George's face of shocked wonder, so impressed him, that he hurried on as if in self-exculpation. "If the statement be untrue, I can only assure you I am not in the least to blame. It was offered to me as a fact by a man whose word I have always found trustworthy, and who professed to be one of the high contracting parties."

"Thank you, sir," said George. "I am very much obliged to you."

He shook hands, scarcely knowing what he did, and left the house. In the whirl of astonishment into which he had been thrown he had forgotten Dom until he encountered him in the shadowed dimness of the drive.

"Well," Dom asked, "had I reason?"

"Yes," said George, "but the thing's a lie for all that."

"I pray to Heaven it may be," Dom replied.

"Monsieur Dom," said George, stopping short in

his walk and facing him, "I begin to see a possible glimmer of light. What have you got against Mr. Hetheridge?"

"Eh!" Dom ejaculated with a quick indrawing of the breath. "But what makes you ask that?"

"You hear that I am to be married to Mr. Hetheridge's daughter, and you seem on a sudden to go mad. You have a silly falsehood brought to you about my mother marrying him, and you come at once to meddle in business that doesn't seem to concern you. Now I can only see one reason for all this. On some ground or other—though why it should matter to you I can't guess—you want to keep the two families apart."

"My dear George," Dom answered, "if there were no other way of keeping the two families apart, and I could do it by throwning my own life away, I would do it."

"That sounds grave," said George, half to himself.

"It is not only grave," Dom answered; "I do not know any words in any language which can tell you how horrible it is."

"What is the man?" cried George, tortured by his companion's words. "Is he the old Dragon in disguise? What is he, or what has he done that a man should say such things about an alliance with him?"

"Give me five minutes to think, let us walk together," said Dom. "I will make up my mind to help you if I can."

They paced down the drive in silence, and walked back along the lane until they reached the spot they had left barely a quarter of an hour before.

"You do not believe in this story of your mother's marriage?" Dom asked, pausing in the road.

"No, I don't believe it."

"Tell me, why not?"

"I don't think my mother will ever marry. I know she never cared for Mr. Hetheridge. They never met for years until the other day. And she never kept a secret from me."

"Forgive me if I wound you," said Dom, with a hand upon George's shoulder, "Hetheridge was her courtier years ago. Suppose he refused his consent to your marriage unless she accepted him."

This suggestion hit George hard, and in a second Ellice's story of his mother's tears and his own certainty that some heavy trouble weighed upon her, flashed conviction through his mind.

"Shall I find you at your house in half an hour?" he asked.

"I will be there."

George sped home. Mrs. Redwood had already retired to her own room, but on his tapping at the door, and calling to her, she put on her dressing-gown and admitted him.

"Mother," he said, "I have seen quite plainly ever since you came back from calling on Mr. Hetheridge that you have been in trouble. Ellice has seen it too, and I think I have found out the cause. I have been told to-night," he hurried on, holding up his hand to motion her to silence as she strove to speak. "I have been told to-night that Mr. Hetheridge gives out that he has your promise to marry him." Her face and attitude told all, and he put his arms round her. "You promise that for our sakes," he said in a voice which half betrayed him. "But I'm not going to buy my happiness at the price of your regret. You could not make me happy in that way, mother. If you're not happy, I never can be, and that's the long and short of it."

"But, George," cried Mrs. Redwood, seeing how useless further concealment was, "you will lose Ellice."

"Very well, dear," George responded, with extreme quiet.

He kissed her on the forehead, and before she knew it he was gone. She ran to the head of the stairs, calling him by name, but he returned no answer. Her bedroom window opened on the garden path. She flew to it, and called him as he passed.



"We will see each other in the morning, dear," he answered. "I have an appointment to-night which I must keep."

All the air-built castles of the last few weeks, glorious, stable to look upon, steeped in hues of sunrise, had melted suddenly into a threatening, cloudy rack, behind which no star of hope appeared. Ellice looked further away than she had ever done, now, but the acceptance of his mother's sacrifice as a means of winning her was so flatly impossible, that he had not so much as even a momentary temptation to yield to it. What mystery lay in Dom's keeping was beyond his power to guess, but he could no longer close his eyes to his own belief that something serious was involved in it.

He walked rapidly, and in ten minutes came in sight of the steady gleam of Dom's window. The Frenchman heard his approaching footsteps and came to the door to meet him.

"You have seen her?"

"I have seen her."

"And the thing was true?"

"Yes, it was true."

"Come inside," Dom besought him, touched by the pitiable harshness of his voice.

George obeyed. Dom set a seat before him and handed him a glass of wine which he had poured out in readiness.

"Drink that, my dear young friend, and sit down. I have been thinking, and I had made up my mind before you left me. I am resolved now. I will find this man in London. I will stand face to face with him. He shall say 'Yes' or 'No' to my suspicion."

"Your suspicion?" asked George. "You can put a man to all this misery and anxiety for a mere suspicion?"

"It is a suspicion which has been, to my mind, a certainty for years past," Dom returned. "Have patience till to-morrow. I have made up my mind. After to-morrow you shall know."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

NEXT morning found Dom on his way to London. He had shaved and dressed with an unusual and scrupulous care, and in his black frock coat, broad cravat, and silk hat, had very much the look of a general retired from active service. The little bit of red ribbon in the left lapel of his coat helped to lend him an air of distinction, and he sat with his gloved hands crossed on the knob of his walking-stick, so motionless and so resolute in aspect that his fellow-passengers stared a good deal at him, and exchanged glances with each other. His military aspect by no means belied his temper, for he was in a mood to scale a fortress single-handed. Nor was the service on which he entered devoid of danger. He proposed no less to himself than flatly to accuse John Hetheridge of murder. Hetheridge by this time occupied a high place in London financial circles, was absolutely free of suspicion of foul play in any direction, highly respected, and was, in general, almost inaccessible to accusation.

"What do I know?" Dom asked himself in silence as he rode. "Let me see how the chain holds. Link one:—Hetheridge has known an André Dom in Australia. He is at least familiar with the name, and was as likely to have used that as any other. Link two:—Before he went out to Australia his hatred of Redwood was a matter of common knowledge. He had threatened to have the life of any man who married Ellice Greenaway. Link three:—He loses himself in the bush, learns of the rumor of his own death, and finds himself, if it so pleased him, effaced from the world. Link four:—He does actually efface himself, denying

his own name to the men who rescued him. Link five:—There are two years in his career for which he declines to account to anybody. Link six:—He appears in Wellsted in his own person on the day after the murder. Link seven:—The murdered man is hardly cold in his grave when Hetheridge begins to make approaches to the widow. Link eight:—He hears my name called and turns in a horrible agony of fear. Link nine:—He pretends not to know a word of French and listens quaking whilst I speak of the murder in that language. Is there a link missing anywhere? No. The chain will hold!"

There were other considerations yet which weighed with him. From the moment at which the suspicion he had carried so long in silence had dawned upon him, he had lost no opportunity of inquiring into Hetheridge's past, and into the history of the elder Redwood. He had learned of Hetheridge's groundless belief in the dishonesty of the murdered man's father. He had learned further that Redwood had been without an enemy in the world, save Hetheridge. Further yet, he knew that the André Dom who had committed the murder, had no cause of quarrel whatever with his victim. Coupling all these facts with the strange evanishment of so marked a figure as the murderer, he seemed to himself to have forged a chain as strong as death.

Whether he were right or wrong, and no shadow of a doubt assailed his mind, he felt, now that this crisis had arrived, that he was pushed on by an inexorable necessity, a duty which could not be denied or shirked. Terrible as the possibility of a marriage between George and Ellice had appeared to him, even that shrank into nothing by the side of the incredible atrocity of that second union which was made contingent on the first.

He had asked himself over and over again, "why do I make this my business?" but always to answer that no man not sunk in the most desperate slough of in-

difference could fail to make it his business if he guessed the truth.

Arrived in London, he betook himself to a chop-house that he knew, drank a glass of wine there, as an excuse for asking for a sight of the London Directory, and in a few minutes was master of Hetheridge's address. He mounted a passing omnibus and alighted near Hetheridge's place of business, where he walked resolutely in and presented his card. One of Hetheridge's clerks carried the card in to his employer, who barely glanced at it and threw it aside.

"Ask him his business," he said, almost snappishly. The mere name came as a great shock to him, but he contrived to bear it and to show no sign. The clerk returned.

"The gentleman says his business is private but very urgent."

"Then tell him," Hetheridge returned, "to write about it."

Again the clerk retired, and again returned.

"The gentleman insists on a personal interview, sir."

"Tell him I'm engaged and can't see him."

Once more the clerk retired, and again returned.

"The gentleman says he will wait until you can."

"Tell him," snapped Hetheridge, "to go to the devil."

The clerk finally retired, but forbore to deliver the message as given, softening it on his own responsibility into the statement that Mr. Hetheridge declined to receive the visitor.

"That," said Dom, "is link number ten," though on reflection he saw that it was scarcely worth while to attach so much importance to a busy man's refusal to receive a visitor who declined to disclose his business.

"We shall see if he will see me," said Monsieur Dom aloud, and taking a seat in the outer office, he produced a newspaper purchased on the journey and began steadfastly to read.

The hour approached at which Hetheridge invariably

went out for luncheon, and he was in the act of putting on his gloves when the clerk who had brought him news of Dom's arrival, entered the room with a bundle of papers which he laid upon the table.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the clerk, "but the gentleman is still waiting."

"Very well," said Hetheridge, throwing his gloves back into the hat from which he had taken them. "I won't be troubled with the fellow. Impudent begging-letter imposter! Send round for luncheon. I will take it here."

Monsieur Dom was not rendered so insensible to the ordinary business of life by the agitation of his errand but that the odor of the viands which passed into the inner office reminded him that his own luncheon-hour had passed. He stuck stolidly to his post, however, though once or twice he thought of his pipe with yearning. For the first time in his life he read the advertisement columns of a great London journal, and had ample time to read them nearly all. He found a trivial, dreary sort of interest in them, though his mind never really wavered from his mission for an instant. Four o'clock came, and the clerk whom he had originally addressed accosted him.

"We're going to clear out now, sir. You won't see Mr. Hetheridge to-day."

"We shall see about that," Dom answered.

"I forgot to tell you," said the clerk, with something of a facetious air, "that Mr. Hetheridge left the offices by the back way an hour and a half ago."

Monsieur Dom had no belief in the existence of a back way, the responsible-looking business man, coming out of the inner room at this minute, and walking briskly away with a crisp good-afternoon to his subordinates, he began to see that the actual closing-time had arrived and that he would have little opportunity of waiting further. The clerks themselves locked up their desks, and exchanged their office coats for smarter garments.

"Now, sir, if you please," said one of them, and he walked perforce on to the landing. The outer door of the office snapped behind him, the clerks with an explosion of laughter, dashed clattering down the stairs and he was left alone. He followed the retreating footsteps slowly down the street, which just then was thronged with hurrying figures. Three minutes later he stood in solitude, and only the rumble of near and distant traffic was left to tell him that London was not suddenly transformed into a desert. He walked thoughtfully up and down, keeping the entrance to the office constantly in view, and by and by a lonely policeman walking toward him, he hailed him and posed a question.

"Is there any back way into this row of buildings?"

"No, sir," returned the officer. "The only entrance is from the front."

"Thank you," said Monsieur Dom, smiling grimly. "That will do."

He walked up and down the deserted pavement, whilst the afternoon sunshine and its following shadow slid higher and higher up the walls of the houses opposite. He saw it redden the high chimney-pots and disappear, and still he paced up and down with a constant eye upon the doorway. The rumbling of traffic in near and distant streets lulled and swelled, lulled and swelled again, and after one prolonged roar like that of a sea grinding on a pebbly beach, died away altogether. The lamplighter went his rounds. The stars began to twinkle faintly in the paling sky. An oppressive silence reigned, broken only by the sound of Monsieur Dom's own footsteps.

The dusk of night was falling thickly round him, when at last his resolute patience was rewarded, and Hetheridge came out upon the street, glancing swiftly and suspiciously this way and that along the street. As it chanced, Dom stood in shadow, and a lamp immediately opposite the entrance to the offices, revealed Hetheridge quite plainly. After an instant's pause,

he turned, unconscious for the moment of pursuit, and walked with a gait too relaxed and shaken for a man of his years, along the street. Dom followed with a swift and resolute step, and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"*Excusez moi, monsieur, parlez-vous Français?*"

"No," said Hetheridge, bluntly, and walked on.

"*Excusez moi, encore,*" pursued Dom, sardonically, and then in the same language, "Monsieur compels me to inform him that he is a liar."

He had marked out his plan of campaign, and was determined on one swift *coup*. Hetheridge started at the reply thus flung at him, but possessed himself again, walked on and made no sign.

"Monsieur has not understood that observation," continued Monsieur Dom, still clinging to his native tongue. "Very good. We will try another. Monsieur will permit me to inform him that I accuse him to his face——" he paused of set purpose, and Hetheridge looked at him, his writhing face ghastly in the gloom, "I charge him to his face as a murderer."

Hetheridge gave a gasping cry and staggered forward, and if Dom had not supported him, he would have fallen.

"Ah," said Dom, dropping the tone of cruel badinage he had hitherto adopted, but still speaking in his own tongue, "you understand me now?"

"No," said Hetheridge, beside himself with horror, "*pas un mot. Je ne parle pas Français. Je le jure.*"

Scattered as his wits were, he had scarcely spoken the words when he recognized his own amazing folly. The street rocked and whirled with him. There were dancing sparks of fire and blackness before his eyes, and there was a sick frost of terror in his heart. His accuser stood regarding him in silence, and that silence lasted, to Hetheridge's fancy, for a long space of time, though in reality it was but brief.

"I have trapped you at last, fox that you are," said Dom.

Hetheridge's mind began once more to serve him. How much did the man know? How much was guesswork? He felt that his own best safeguard lay for the time in silence. Was it vengeance, or justice, or blackmail? How did he know that he really had anything to fear?

"I shall have to talk with you," Dom said. "You will not refuse me an audience this time, I think."

"I am not well," said Hetheridge, speaking in English. "I have not been well for months past. I did not know you at first. You startled me. I thought you meant to rob me."

"Where shall we have our talk?" Dom demanded. He still spoke in his own language, but Hetheridge was not to be further beguiled. He feigned not to understand, and murmured something about getting old before his time. He was horribly shaken, but he purposely exaggerated his own symptoms to gain time and to recover his power of fence. Dom disdained a subterfuge and addressed him in English:

"Where shall we go?"

"There is a hotel not far away," said Hetheridge. "If you would help me to it I should take it as a favor."

Dom seized him by the arm and led him in the direction he had indicated.

"Not so fast," said Hetheridge. "I am not strong, and a shock of this kind unmans me. Was it you who called this morning? I had forgotten your name until I recognized you a moment back. You should have sent in a statement of your business. Perhaps you may be able to tell me its nature by and by, when I have recovered myself a little."

He spoke with halting breath and with a strange catch in his voice. These came by nature, but he made them more marked than they need have been. Dom watched and questioned within himself. The shock might have possibly upset the villain's faculties for the moment, or he might be foxing.



Hetheridge, walking with apparent difficulty, indicated the turnings to be taken by a wordless gesture, and in a few minutes they reached an old-fashioned city hotel and entered together, Dom still retaining his hold upon his captive's arm.

"Let us have a private room," he said to a waiter who lounged in the passage. "This gentleman and I have business together."

"And send me a glass of brandy-and-water," said Hetheridge. "I am not very well. I have received a shock."

The waiter obeyed their orders, and they were left alone in a sombre and ill-lighted room. Hetheridge sank into a chair, drank his brandy-and-water at a gulp, and then with an admirable assumption of a return to common-place drew one leg across the other and clasped his ankle with both hands, looked up with an air of one who awaits a communication.

"I am better now," he said. "Perhaps you will unfold your business."

"I will beg you for your own sake, not to play the fool with me," Dom answered in a guarded voice. "My business is to tell you that your wicked villany is detected at last, beyond a doubt."

"My villany?" said Hetheridge. He panted and trembled still, and the sick frost still had possession of his heart, but he was master of his own resources once more. The fight was one for life or death and no audacity could harm. "My villany: that is a strange beginning, Mr. Dom."

Whatever shred or tatter of doubt had existed in Dom's mind before he had accosted Hetheridge in the street had been swept away forever. He answered sternly.

"You will find it useless to equivocate."

"Describe the villany," said Hetheridge, with a puzzled air, and with a touch of anger as well as of bewilderment in his tone. "Give a name to it."

"Murder is its name," said Dom. "I denounce you as the murderer of George Redwood."

"You denounce me," Hetheridge began, but Dom cut him short.

"I denounce you as the murderer of George Redwood at Upnor in the October of eighteen fifty-nine."

"My dear sir," cried Hetheridge, "this passes patience. Was it to make this insane accusation that you waited on me this morning?"

Dom rose to a white heat within, but kept passably cool on the outside in face of this astonishing effrontery.

"You play to save your neck," he said. "Very good. It is natural that you should play a bold and cunning game. Do you know George Cashmore?"

He put the question with a disconcerting suddenness and watched like a hawk for its effect.

"No," said Hetheridge. "I never heard of the man."

"That," returned Dom, "is what George Cashmore said of John Hetheridge, though he and John Hetheridge were the same."

"I am sorry to see you qualifying for a mad-house at this rate," Hetheridge answered, scornfully.

"Wait a moment," cried Dom, "and listen to me. I will bring a score of witnesses to swear that you threatened George Redwood's life. I will bring two men to swear that when you were lost in the Australian bush, you hid your name from the men who rescued you. I will prove that you reached Wellsted on the day after the murder. I will prove that for two years you can give no account of your time that can be corroborated. I can prove you knew the man whose name you passed under in England. I saw your face when you heard that name called out seven years after the murder. I know that not another man in the world had a grudge against George Redwood."

"And then?" said Hetheridge. "These are all in-

teresting circumstances, doubtless, and some of them are true enough. Do you consider what you are doing, Mr. Dom? You are bringing the gravest charge known to the law against a man whose character has never been impeached till now. How do you suppose that a magistrate will receive your statement if you are so very ill-advised as to give me in charge?"

He melted like wax before a surprise, but he was adamant to stand a siege. He had never in his life held all his faculties better in command than he did now. His coolness foiled Dom altogether, and filled him with so bitter a sense of impotence and exasperation that for a moment he could find no words.

"My poor dear friend, George Redwood," Hetheridge continued, "was murdered by a Frenchman, a man who bore your name, as you have reason to remember. That man was known more or less to every inhabitant of Upnor."

"You were that man," said Dom.

"My dear good madman, let me ask you, how it came about if I were that man, that I visited Upnor only a day or two after the murder and was not denounced. Everybody who knew the man, knew me. Why have I gone scot-free all these years?"

"Because of your own infernal cunning," said Dom, choking with discomfiture and wrath.

"Of course," said Hetheridge, nursing his ankle in both hands and looking Dom quite steadily in the face. "Of course, the question stands absurdly outside the limits of discussion, but if it pleases you we will submit the whole thing to arbitration. We will call in, let us say, the landlord, who knows me very well, and you shall tell your story. If he believes it you shall give me in charge, and if he doesn't believe it, you shall allow me to present you at Bedlam as a person unfit to be at large."

"What I know," cried Dom, starting to his feet, "I know. I have seen guilt on your face. Twice I have seen it. There was a plain confession there to-night."

I will track you yet. I will trace every day of those two hidden years. I will dedicate my life to that task, and I will spend my last farthing on it."

"My dear friend," said Hetheridge, totally unmoved on the outside. "It matters little to me what purpose you devote your life to. If you go on as you are doing it will very shortly matter very little to anybody."

"You devilish liar and imposter," cried Dom, falling back upon his native tongue again in the extremity of anger.

"*Plait-il, monsieur?*" said Hetheridge, with sardonic coolness. "You see," he said, "I know a word or two of your delightful language, Mr. Dom. I don't pretend to any serious knowledge of it, but I find I understand a little now and then. Perhaps on the whole it might not be amiss if we were to say 'Good-night.' You may be as clever as you please, and as cheeky as you please, but I offer no blackmail."

Dom felt his own impotence too keenly to prolong the struggle.

"God is just," he said. "All will be known in His good time."

He went away checked, dispirited, and seeming aged by a dozen years, as he crept from the hotel which he had entered so confidently.

But at that very hour Nemesis was astir.

## CHAPTER XXV.

ON the morning of the day on which Dom set out for London, young Redwood rose early after a sleepless night. In middle age a slight anxiety may rob a man of his slumbers, but it takes something serious to make the night of a wholesome lad of three-and-twenty altogether feverish and unrestful. He had counted the strokes of the village clock as it struck the quarters and the hours, and had faced a thousand phantoms before the gray dawn glimmered on the window-blind. Before the day had well declared itself he rose and dressed in stealthy quiet, fearing to disturb his mother, and having foraged for a glass of milk and a crust, took up his gun, thrust a double handful of cartridges into his pocket and strolled toward the Weybridge Woods, less with intent against the rabbits there than to give his mind a chance of clearing itself in the fresh air of morning from the vagabond fancies of the night.

For a landowner, a man of exceptionally old family, and a Tory, Mr. Weybridge had one remarkable characteristic. He was an ardent opposer of the Game Laws, and steadfastly refused to preserve his shooting, and ever since George had been of an age to carry a gun he had the freedom of wood and warren. So far as the rabbits were concerned his license lasted all the year round, and constant practice had made him a dead-shot.

He had not walked far when the faithful Sam appeared in sight, and at once attached himself to the young favorite as a matter of course. Sam was an

early riser by old habit, and always smoked his first pipe in the open air, unless held within doors by extreme stress of weather.

When the first greetings were over, George showed himself indisposed to talk, and Sam yielding obedience to his mood, they rambled on in silence. The rabbits seemed unusually plentiful that morning, but George threw away half a dozen chances, and missed two or three easy shots.

"Here, Sam," he said at length, handing the gun to his companion. "You'd better try your hand. I'm no good this morning. I don't feel as if I cared about it."

Sam recalled his own sensations in early courtship when 'Tilda had chosen to be too coy or too exacting—too much disposed in one way or another to test the limits of her power—and he came to the conclusion that Miss Hetheridge had been "playing up" with her sweetheart.

"That'll be all right in a day or two," said Sam, within himself, "but it's nasty unpleasant while it lasts."

He grew very keen on the shooting, which was a rare form of sport with him, and soon forgot to notice his comrade's dejected manner. When he had rolled over half a dozen rabbits, the sound of a gun not far away reverberated through the woods, and George took back his own piece. A rabbit darting across the path a moment later, he fired.

"Hullo!" called a hearty voice at some little distance. "Who's out there?"

"I don't know that voice," said Sam. "Who is it?"

"I don't know it either," Redwood answered, but he shouted back in answer to the hail.

A crackling noise was heard, as of some heavy body forcing its way through the dry undergrowth. It came nearer, and by and by an unusually portly gentleman, elderly and white of beard, but florid in complexion, and with eyes as bright as a bird's, stepped out upon

the path. He stared at Redwood almost as if he had seen a ghost.

"Upon my soul," he said, as if to himself, "I never saw such a likeness in my life. You've forgotten me, I suppose, young gentleman?"

"No, indeed, Sir Eustace," Redwood answered.

"By gad," said the baronet, shaking him warmly by the hand, "I should have known you anywhere. I should have recognized you in the middle of the great Sahara. Such an extraordinary likeness I can't remember to have seen. You're your father over again—even to the little bits of side whisker," he added, moving his head from side to side, as his keen eyes took stock of George.

"My mother tells me so," Redwood answered, "but a little miniature we have at home tells quite a different story."

"Well," said Sir Eustace, "I'll back your mother against the miniature. You're out early," cried Sir Eustace, in his jolly way. "So am I. I like to taste the day when it's fresh, and there's no better companion than a gun. This one isn't much use to me," he continued, holding out the weapon he carried. "Stock's too long. Can't get the confounded thing to my shoulder. And how are you? And how's your mother? I got down last night," he went on, without waiting for a reply to these queries. "I heard you'd called, but I was chatting with my sister at the time. And how's old Dom? Good chap, Dom. Knows his business. Weybridge gets all the prizes now. I did when old Dom was with me. First-rate fellow, Dom." He fixed his keen eyes on Potter. "I've seen you before somewhere."

"Well you have, boss, and that's a fact," Sam answered.

"I thought so," said Sir Eustace, staring at him. "Where was it?"

Sam gave him a mysterious, sidelong motion of the head to indicate that he would rather answer this ques-

tion in private. Redwood observing this strolled a few paces away, and Sam with a repetition of the sidelong motion and throwing in a mysterious wink with it, led Sir Eustace in an opposite direction.

"The young boss has never been told about it," he whispered, "and I don't want him to know. Him and me's been mates, ever since he was that high. I was brought up before you," said Sam, leaning forward and breathing hard into the baronet's ear, "on suspicion of his father."

Sir Eustace started back in a momentary astonishment.

"Ah," he said, "I remember now." He looked Sam up and down in some wonderment at the respectability of his appearance. "And what are you doing here?"

"Well, it's this way, boss. I'm a livin' on my income."

"Oh," said Sir Eustace, dryly, "you're one of the local gentry are you?"

"They call me a gentleman on the voting list," Sam answered with perfect simplicity, "but that don't make a heap o' difference. I don't set much store by it anyhow. It doesn't make much difference in the price o' tea, does it, boss?"

"As I seem to remember," Sir Eustace answered, "tea was not your beverage when I made your acquaintance."

"It is now though," Sam returned, "and has been this many a year. It's like this, you know——"

"Well, I'm glad you've reformed," said Sir Eustace, cutting him short magisterially. "It was drink that led you into that scrape, my good fellow."

"Right you are, boss," Sam assented, warmly. "Right you are. But it was like this, you know——"

"Redwood," Sir Eustace shouted, and marched off after the youngster, somewhat impolitely to Sam's way of thinking.

George paused till the baronet overtook him, and Sam following sauntered in the rear.



"You've taken your degree?" said Sir Eustace. He looked with evident admiration at the stalwart, well-set-up young fellow beside him. "Trinity Hall, I think they said. And now what are you going to do with yourself?"

"I mean to make a civil engineer," George answered. "I'm off to Liège in a week or two to get an insight into the practical part of the business."

"That's well," said Sir Eustace. "Nothing like having an occupation if you wish to be happy. I've been obliged to put up with hobbies all my life. A profession would have been the making of me. What are you doing to-day?"

George confessed that he had nothing special on hand.

"Then," said the baronet, "come and breakfast with me. Seven o'clock's my time. Weybridge won't be down till eight, and I shall be lonely. Directly after breakfast I'm going to have a shy at some of those giant carp in the park pool. Come and join, and we'll make a merry morning of it."

"Thank you, Sir Eustace," said the youngster, "I will with pleasure. I must let my mother know where I am, but Sam will see to that for me." He turned to Potter, who was lounging tranquilly in the rear, pipe in mouth. "I'm going to breakfast with Sir Eustace Wyncombe, Sam," he said. "Will you call as you go home and let my mother know? And, by-the-way, I tell you what you might do for me. You might go into my room and get my fishing-tackle. I shall want——" and here he ran into details of rods, line, and bait.

Sam accepted the commission with alacrity.

"You'll want somebody to punt you about, Master George," he said. "I'm the man for that job."

"If Sir Eustace pleases," George returned, and the baronet offering no opposition, the arrangement was made.

Whilst Sir Eustace and George were still at breakfast, Sam carried the fishing-tackle up to the hall, and

in due time set off with them to the park pool, where he set to work with great vigor to bail out and mop up an old punt which was moored in the boat-house. All being in readiness, the trio embarked, and Redwood and Sir Eustace beguiled the carp, whilst Sam smoked his pipe in tranquil enjoyment, and lent a hand when he could be of service.

George was not very sorry to have escaped the threatened conference with his mother. It could hardly be less than painful to them both, and though he knew that he had only secured a postponement, the weight was off his shoulders for the moment, and with the happy elasticity of youth, he felt his spirits rising, and determined vaguely that everything would go well after all.

Sir Eustace had the first stroke of luck, and found himself engaged with a monster, who, after affording excellent play, was brought in workmanlike fashion to the side of the punt, where Sam was in readiness for him with the landing-net. Almost at that instant, George felt a tug at his own line, and forgot everything but the excitement of the sport. The fish lay like a log and sulked.

"Feel this, Sir Eustace," he cried. "If it weren't for an occasional tremble in the line you might think I was anchored fast to the bottom."

Sir Eustace took the rod and surrendered it lingeringly and unwillingly.

"You're in luck," he said, half enviously, "You've got a real whacker there. Handle him delicately, he'll begin to stir in a while."

The fish endured much gentle persuasion before he could be roused from his first attitude of sulky protest. But by and by he began to make a fight for it.

"He's making for that weed bed," cried Sir Eustace, who watched every move with excited interest. "Keep him from that or you've lost him."

The line was as taut as a harp-string, and the rod was bent nearly double. The fish hung like an im-

movable dead weight and all on a sudden with a tearing sound the rod gave way at the second joint from the top, and the angler stumbling backward, would have toppled into the water but for Sam's intervention. The fish amazed at the sudden relaxation of the strain made a dash toward the punt and the rod was secured, and a considerable portion of the loose line drawn in and made fast. It parted like a bit of tow a moment later and George sat ruefully down to lament his lost opportunity and to anathematize the rod maker.

"There's a piece of rubbish for you," he said in a doleful voice, "split from top to bottom. Beautifully balanced it was too. I shall never get a rod to suit me better."

"The virtue of a rod," said Sir Eustace, with easy wisdom, "is to hold whatever you get on it."

"I can make that good, Master George," said Sam. "At least I think I can. I've got some old pieces down at home, and I think there's one of them that fits this. I'm almost sure there is."

"Just run up to the hall and get another rod, there's a good fellow," said Sir Eustace, in his good-humoredly autocratic way, and Sam obediently made off.

This episode of the broken rod led to serious and unlooked-for results. When the day's sport was over Sam took the sound pieces home, and found that, as he believed, a spare joint of his own fitted the place of the broken one to perfection, and in the dusk of the evening he walked up to Mrs. Redwood's house, and presented himself at the hall door. There was still a little lingering light without, but within doors all was dark. Sam rang, and for a while received no answer, but by and by George Redwood himself responded to his summons.

"Hello, Potter old man, is that you?" he cried from the darkness of the hall. "My mother's out, and the girls have gone off gossiping into the town. I've been sitting thinking and keeping blind man's holiday. Come in. I'll get a light in a minute."

Sam groped his way into the hall, and as he did so, George, wheeling briskly round, came into rough contact with the hall table. He recovered himself in a moment, laughed, and walked along the hall, leaving Potter in a very curious and remarkable condition of mind. That little accident had happened somewhere before, and it seemed to him a matter of the supremest moment that he should find out when and where. Whilst he stood pondering he saw the glimmer of a light from a corridor which ran from one side of the hall. A fall against a table in the dark, followed by a glimmering of light. What did that mean? When had these two things happened in his history before? And why should they be of such moment to him? The light came nearer, as he seemed to have known it would.

"Come along, old chap. You know the way," cried George.

He followed like a man in a dream. What was there wonderful in a man carrying a lighted candle in a dark corridor that it should startle him so, and awake in his heart such an amazed expectancy and fear. The shutters of the room they entered were fast, as he had known they would be. He knew the knee-table which stood at one of the windows. There was nothing remarkable in it—he had seen it scores of times before, and yet its presence seemed to deepen the sense of bewildered awe which had stolen on him.

Redwood set the candle on the table and held out his hand for the fishing-rod, which Sam handed to him in its canvas case. Redwood, turning to the table, untied the string by which the case was secured, and began to inspect the rod. Potter, with that dream-like look of expectancy deepening on his face with every passing second, glanced toward the mantel-piece, and there, standing on one corner of it, was a little Japanese nitchki, precisely such a figure as he had regarded in a room in Melbourne years ago, at the instant when Hetheridge's murderous stroke had felled

him to the floor. The pulses in his head beat loud, and his breath came short and quick. The room seemed to darken and dazzle on his sight, and suddenly he turned with a wild cry on his companion.

"My God, matey, I remember!"

Redwood started from his seat, and, turning, seized Potter by the arm just as he seemed in the act of falling.

"My dear chap," he asked, "what's the matter with you? Here, sit down."

He led him to a sofa, and having seated him there crossed the room for the candle and returned.

"I'm all right now," said Sam. "It came to me at a run. I've been trying to get at it for years, and now I've got it."

He was staring and trembling, and the sweat stood in beads upon his forehead. Redwood was in some natural fear about him, and scrutinized him with a close anxiety.

"What have you got, old chap?" he asked, soothingly. "Now don't you excite yourself, take it easy."

"I'm all right," said Sam, again. "Don't you mind me, Mr. George. I'm righter than I have been for years past. I've got my memory back again. It's knocked me about a bit, coming so sudden like, but I'm all right."

Redwood still regarded him solicitously, but thought it judicious to hold his tongue and wait. Sam drew out a gayly colored handkerchief from his pocket, and mopped his face. When he looked up, the traces of excitement had so far vanished that Redwood felt relieved.

"Now old chap," he said, setting the candle on the mantel-piece. "What was it?"

"I'll tell you," Sam responded, "I'll tell you all about it. In fifty-seven—that's eighteen years ago, ain't it?—I was in Melbourne—me and 'Tilda was married just a month or two. I'd come into my property and 'Tilda wanted to come home. So did I. Not be-

cause there was anybody here I cared about or a soul as might remember me for that matter, but I thought I'd like to see the old country again. I was willin' to do anything to oblige 'Tilda, and so I agreed to come. Well, 'Tilda had been in service. She'd been a nurse-maid."

"That was to Miss Hetheridge?" interjected Redwood.

"I didn't mean to tell you that just yet, but I might ha' known you'd guess. That was to Miss Hetheridge, as you say. I'd meant to leave his name out, but it's got in and it may stop in. Hetheridge, he went up country, and the little gell was off to England with the Rev. Jordan Farrell. That was the time as I got married, while Hetheridge got bushed up on the Wallagong as it was given out as he was dead."

"Yes," said Redwood, "I remember to have heard of that."

"His death was in the papers. His house at St. Kilda—that's a part of Melbourne where the nobs live—his house was empty. The housekeeper had gone away and took the key with her. 'Tilda's bit of a swag was there and I borrowed the key and went to fetch it away. Now who should I meet in that there deserted empty house but Hetheridge himself. He was the picture o' death with a two months' beard on him and dressed like a common roustabout. I pinned him at first mistakin' him for a thief, but when I found out who it was, o' course I let him go. We went into a room to talk. 'You wait there a minute,' says he, 'and I'll talk to you directly.' He sits down at a table like that there and I turns away to look about the room."

Sam rose, and walking to the mantel-piece took up the little Japanese figure.

"That," he said, holding it under Redwood's gaze in his brown palm. "That is the thing as brought it all back to my mind again. I was standing lookin' at a thing on Hetheridge's mantel-piece, the very

livin' image of this one, when all of a sudden I gets a regular welter on the head, enough to knock your brains out. It was nigh on two years afore I got my wits again."

"And you believe that Hetheridge struck you?" Redwood asked in half incredulous astonishment.

"Of course, he did," cried Potter. "There wasn't a soul in the house but him and me. Left me there for dead, the murderous-minded scoundrel."

"But the motive," said Redwood, almost querulously. "What was the motive? Why should he take your life? Were you enemies?"

"We wasn't the best of friends," Sam answered. "But there was no real ill-blood between us. Not as I ever understood."

The story looked on the face of it, wildly improbable. Redwood had heard, over and over again, that in his own younger days, before their acquaintance had begun, Sam Potter had been "queer." He had known him intimately since then, and had never found even the trace of a twist in Sam's simple and transparently honest mind. Here, perhaps, he thought, the crank might show itself for the first time in his remembrance. The absence of intelligible motive in the deed ascribed to Hetheridge, seemed fatal to belief.

"What do you intend to do about this, Sam?" he asked after a long cogitation.

"Do?" Sam returned, "I don't suppose I can do anything. It's like this, you see. It's my word agen' his. It's eighteen years ago. How do I know where the Melbourne doctors are now? How could I get 'em over here to swear I was knocked on the head?"

"Tell me, Sam," said Redwood, "are you quite sure that this is no fancy of yours?"

"Fancy," Sam answered, rather bitterly. "It's no fancy that that there cruel night's work robbed me o' three o' the best years of my life. You ask 'Tilda and she'll tell you. I was like a baby on her hands for the best part of a year. Like a kid I was. I forgot

how to speak for eight months, and that was all along o' meeting him, here in Wellsted, outside your gates. I remembered everything then of a sudden just I did to-night. I took him by the neck and I marched him off to the police. It was too much for me—knocked me clean silly. I was afraid it was goin' to do the same thing again to-night, but I'm stronger now, thank God. No, no, Master George, there's no fancy about it, whatever else there is."

He was absolutely cool and collected to look at, and had never in his life spoken more rationally or collected. George, not knowing what to make of the story, sat with his head in his hands trying to think some meaning into it. Neither he nor Potter had heeded a ring at the outer door, but now there came a knock at the door of the room they sat in. One of the maids had returned from the gossip of which George had accused her.

"Mr. Dom is below and wishes to see you, sir."

"Show him in here."



## CHAPTER XXVI.

DOM entered, a trifle pale and prodigiously grave. He glanced with a touch of surprise at Potter, and lifted warning eyebrows at Redwood as if he would advise him to say nothing in that presence.

"After what happened between you and me the night before last," said Redwood, "it's rather appropriate that you should come at this moment. Potter here has been telling me a very curious story. Tell it again, Sam. Perhaps Monsieur Dom may be able to make something of it. I confess I can't."

Sam, leaning forward on the sofa, still held the little Japanese nitchki in his fingers, turning it hither and thither, and seeming to observe it with minute care. In that attitude he retold his story. George was forced to notice a grave lucidity in this second relation not at all characteristic of Potter's ordinary method of speech, which was involved and labored.

"There it is," he said, when he had finished, "Master George is puzzled to know what he done it for, and so am I."

"And so am I not," said Dom, to the great surprise of both. "Let me ask you a question, Mr. Pottare."

"Yes," said Sam, laconically. "Fire away."

"You thought this villain dead?"

"Of course, I did."

"Was there anybody at that time, who to your knowledge and belief, supposed him to be alive?"

"Say that again," said Sam.

"Did everybody believe him to be dead?"

"Yes, everybody. His death was in the papers. He'd been given up for dead for pretty nigh on two months."

"That is the last link in my chain," said Dom. "If I had known this last night I could have confounded him."

"For heaven's sake, Monsieur Dom," cried George, "don't let us walk in mystery any longer. I have a stake in the matter, and I have a right to understand."

"Patience, my poor young friend," answered Dom, "you will know only too soon."

"You believe this story?" George whispered, drawing him aside.

"I believe it unreservedly," Dom answered. "I have reason for believing it. I have thought it all over all night and all day. You shall know everything I can tell you, but not here. You must come to my house, and there we can talk in quiet. What I shall have to tell you is for your ear alone."

"Sam," said Redwood, "Monsieur Dom has something of great importance to say to me. You don't mind our leaving you?"

"No," Sam returned. "Do your own business, Master George, I shall be glad to get home and have a talk with 'Tilda."

The three left the house together and walked in silence until their ways parted, when they shook hands and took their separate roads. As Dom entered his own lamp-lit room, George could see that he was terribly agitated. His hands trembled. His features twitched, and his eyes were full of a gloomy trouble and resolve. He locked the door and pouring out a wineglassful of neat cognac, pushed it across the table.

"You had better drink that," he said. "You may find that you will need it."

"No," George answered. "I'll have no Dutch courage."

"You had better take it," Dom urged, but his companion refused a second time with an impatient anger. "Then sit down and gather all your strength for you will need it."

George obeyed the injunction to be seated and

braced himself to meet whatever might be preluded by these menacing words.

"I shall pain you, my dear boy," said Dom, with a profound pity in his voice. "I shall pain you terribly, but I cannot help it. You know the manner of your father's death?"

George tried to answer in the affirmative, but his voice refused to obey his will. He nodded, therefore, and sat in awful expectations, not as yet knowing what to fear.

"His murderer," Dom pursued, "was believed to have borne the same name as myself. He passed utterly out of sight at the time of the murder, and has never been heard of since."

"I know," George answered, in a grating voice, so unlike his own that it startled him.

"Now, as I am a sinful man," said Dom, speaking with profound solemnity, "and as I hope for mercy, I tell you that I know your father's murderer."

Redwood fell back in his chair and glared at him, unable to articulate a word.

Dom took up the glass of cognac and made a motion toward him, but he waved it away with a wild gesture. Dom slowly and reluctantly set down the glass again, his troubled eyes fixed observantly on George's face.

"Can you bear it? Shall I tell you? Do you guess?"

"Don't tell me yet," George gasped, with a great effort, and seizing the glass he had so recently rejected, drained it and set it back upon the table. "Now. Go on."

"I know, as surely as I know that we are here, that John Hetheridge was the author of your father's death."

Redwood's face sank into his hands, and there was dead silence for a long time.

"How do you know it?" Redwood asked at last.

"I will tell you," Dom responded.

He traced his own suspicions from their first inception in his mind, and George listened in absolute silence,

sitting like a statue. The narrative omitted nothing, and by the time its end was reached looked horribly convincing.

The listener's heart cried out against it. It was impossible that Ellice's father should be the murderer of his own. It was too appalling to be believed, and yet, even whilst his heart passionately rejected it, his mind more than half accepted the story, and the inward conflict produced an actual physical nausea which threatened to benumb both thought and feeling. The crime with which Potter had charged Hetheridge had seemed so motiveless as to be incredible, but Dom's suspicions cast a glare of light across it. The two accusations, coming one upon another from quarters so remote, and fitting into each other so remarkably, seemed at moments to strike protest dumb. He knew that if the revelations of that night had been made to him under other circumstances they would have led him to devote his life to their proof or disproof, and that it was only the intervening thought of the pure and innocent girl to whom he had pledged his troth which held him back from a credence almost complete.

He looked up at length and his face was old and haggard. A dry film seemed drawn across his eyes and he could see but dimly. With a great effort he forced himself to rise and speak.

"You could have done no less than tell me," he began. Tears were running silently down the old Frenchman's face as he clasped Redwood's outstretched hands in his own. "It was impossible to keep silence, but I don't believe it all the same until I know more about it. My mind's made up. It's good-by between Ellice and me, unless I can prove her father's innocence. I can't try to disguise the guilt of my own father's murderer, but I won't wreck my own life for a mere fancy. I must sift this matter to the bottom, Dom. I shall go and face this man with Potter in the morning and hear what he has to say."

Dom approved of this proposal, and they sat down to advise about it.

"I dare not face my mother," said George. "You must tell her for me that I have business of the utmost importance which has taken me away to London. I can get a trap at the Weybridge Arms, and drive over to Colchester to-night, so as to be in time for the morning mail from Harwich. I'll take Potter with me."

His mind was tossed up and down like a sea, but he kept a self-possession which seemed strange even to himself. Dom thought his fortitude splendid and had never esteemed him half so much as now. His heart ached over the blow he had been compelled to deal.

In the supreme moments of life, trifles take an absurd and overmastering importance.

"I dined alone to-night," said George, "and felt too tired to change. I've been out and about like this, all day." He indicated the heavy clay-soiled boots and gaiters he wore, and the rough suit of homespun. "All that is a little countrified for London, isn't it?"

Dom recognized the condition of his mind, and had no charge of trivialities to bring against him.

"You'll tell my mother, won't you?" Redwood asked. "I'll go and look up Potter."

"I will come with you," Dom responded. "I shall have time to deliver your message afterward. It will be best to tell her after you are gone."

Their way led them within sight of the Reverend Jordan Farrell's house, and George turned and paused in the road to look at it. A short dry sob escaped him, and, ashamed of that exposure of his feelings, he walked on.

"It is hard," said Dom, touching him timidly upon the sleeve.

"Yes," said George, curtly. "It is hard. But it makes it no easier to say so."

Potter lent a ready acquiescence to Redwood's plan, though, of course, he was not allowed to understand the full meaning of it.

"You mustn't ask me why, Sam," Redwood said to him, "for I can't tell you; but it's a matter as grave as life and death to me."

"All right, Master George," cried Sam the loyal, "that's enough for me. 'Tilda's away from home, and you'll have to make it square with her when we get back again, or I shall catch it. Hot!" he added after a pause of a full half minute, in which he had allowed the possible domestic consequences of his action to sink deep into his mind.

Dom undertook to explain in this quarter also, and Redwood and Sam set out at once for the Weybridge Arms, ordered the trap at once, and in half an hour were bowling swiftly along the road to Colchester.

They lay at the county town that night, but there was little sleep for one of them. They caught the early train, and were whirled to London. There they sought Hetheridge in vain. His chambers were empty, and at the office his clerks refused to reveal his whereabouts. Any communication by letter would be attended to, but Mr. Hetheridge was ill; had gone into the country for rest and change, and had left word that he would see nobody personally except his own manager. This made the chase look hopeless for the time; but a last despairing inquiry at the chambers elicited from an old laundress, whom they had not met before, the fact that Mr. Hetheridge had recently taken a villa at Richmond, and spent most of his leisure hours there.

By this time it was evening. The air had all day long been sultry and oppressive, and now it was evident that a storm was brewing. As they rode down to Waterloo Station and rattled across the Thames, they saw the vast expanse of sky all coppery red to the zenith; the two bridges; the houses on either side the river, and the palace of Parliament, all glooming in a deep purplish shadow below. There was a far-off growl of thunder, but the storm delayed to burst.

The first railway official of whom they inquired was

able to direct them, and they found the house of which they were in search without further difficulty. They were prepared for further opposition here, and were a little surprised to encounter none.

"Mr. Hetheridge is in his room, sir," said the manservant who answered George's ring. "This way."

A tremendous crash of thunder broke at that instant overhead, sharp, clear, and brief, as a volley of artillery, and immediately upon it followed a wild burst of wind, with slamming doors and a sound of crashing glass from the upper story. The serving-man, crying out that somebody had left the windows open, dashed upstairs, and left them standing in the doorway of the room he had indicated. A strong wind was blowing there, and the figure of Hetheridge struggling to close the French windows against the blast was dimly visible.

In his encounter with Dom, or during the latter half of it at least, Hetheridge had conducted himself with a surpassing coolness, but when once the necessity for the continued strain was over, he began to know how much in nervous force his defensive instinct had cost him. He had stood and watched Dom from the room and had waved his hand after him with a gesture of insolent triumph and disdain, but before the retreating enemy's footsteps had traversed half the stairway, he fell back in a state of extreme collapse into the chair he had just quitted. His head spun like a teetotum, and there was a sound in his ears like that made by the rush of a train through a tunnel. The beating of his heart and the free play of his lungs, seemed restricted by an iron pressure. Little by little these alarming symptoms relaxed in force, and after a pause of perhaps ten minutes he crawled giddily to the bell-pull, rang the bell, and stumbled back again.

The waiter appearing, he demanded another glass of brandy, and after drinking it, felt somewhat better, though still alarmingly weak and shaken, and as dizzy as a man standing on the edge of a precipice. He

was ashamed to ask for a further stimulant, and so feebly fumbling for his purse, paid his score, and crept away to dive into the first house of public resort he came to, and to take a third glass of brandy-and-water there.

His shadowy enemy was at his shoulder again, and in a form far more real than he ever assumed before. He saw him in his habit as he lived at the time when he had first really began to hate him. The figure was always behind him, and yet was present to his mental gaze clear to the least detail. He saw the candid brown eyes, the plain manly features, the fresh color, the little bit of side whisker on the cheek, the homespun dress. He saw the very pattern of the gaiters, the stain of country soil upon the boots. He did not recall any special moment at which he had seen his victim precisely thus, and yet he knew that at some special moment his mind had seized the image and now reproduced it with an absolute fidelity. Had any one been interested in watching him he would have seen the furtive fearful glance across the shoulder, which had become habitual with him, repeated half a dozen times a minute.

With the fourth glass of brandy he screwed his courage to the sticking-point, and ventured anew into the streets. They were almost deserted at that hour, and he walked swiftly but shakily to Broad Street Station, and there paced the platform whilst he waited a train for Richmond due in some ten minutes. The silent invisible avenger haunted him, though it never moved a foot or made the faintest change in posture or expression. It was so real to him that whenever, in his pacing to and fro, he turned sharply round upon his own track a foolish relief and amazement possessed his mind when he failed to see it. He walked briskly, he lagged, zig-zagged purposely here and there, paused altogether. The immovable, unescapable dreadful thing was always at his shoulder, ready to lay a hand upon him. This living nightmare had been his com-



panion more or less for years, but had never been so near, so real or so threatening as now. It would have been a blessed relief to scream aloud, beneath the intolerable anguish of its presence, but that way madness lay, and there was no guessing into what madness of self-denunciation he might be hurried if once he allowed the presence to break down his nerve. He must endure the unendurable—must carry the torment of the damned about with him and make no sign. When the train backed into the railway station he took his place in a lonely carriage, and by mere physical instinct screwed himself tight into a corner seat; but the physical obstacle he interposed made no difference to the position of the unrelenting phantom.

Apart from the awful clearness of his apprehension of its presence, it carried a terror with it he had never known before. All these years he had seemed to be free even of suspicion, and at last one man had formulated against him a charge which his own soul had never failed to bring in any waking hour of any day since the deed was done. He had foiled his accuser for the time, but that meant nothing, or might mean nothing. Any wind of chance might carry new evidence to the man who knew so much and guessed so much already.

He drank deep that night and drugged his fears at last, but when he awoke, sick with excess, he found his ghost still in its place, implacably serene and cheerful, the George Redwood of a quarter of a century ago.

He felt that business was impossible for that day, and he sent a telegram to that effect to town. "If necessary to consult me, come down. Too ill to leave the house. Refuse all inquirers address." An hour or two later his confidential man appeared with a bundle of important papers, and left them for his employer's consideration.

"Come down again, Jessamer," he said. "Come in the afternoon, or better still, come in the evening.

There are a score of things about which I may give you instructions. I'm not altogether well, and I may be forced to take a holiday." The mockery of the phrase hit him hard, and some of its bitterness found its way into his tone. There was small hope of a holiday for him while that placid bugbear stood changeless at his shoulder. "Bring your hand-bag with you and stay the night. I may detain you late."

The invitation was equal to a command, and Jessamer accepted it, bowing low. Hetheridge was his man of men; a king in finance, and with every sign of growth in his importance in financial circles, Jessamer took higher rank among his compeers. He had never had such an honor placed upon him as Hetheridge now offered. To be invited as a guest at Hetheridge's house, if only for a night, was in itself a high distinction. If he had known the compelling dread of loneliness which dictated the invitation, he might, perhaps, have felt less flattered by it.

"Can you be here to dinner?" Hetheridge asked.

"At what hour, sir?"

"Say seven o'clock."

"I fear, sir," returned Mr. Jessamer with a smooth obsequiousness, "that that will be impossible. The American mail leaves to-night. I shall be scarcely able to quit the office before seven."

"Ah, yes," said Hetheridge; "of course, of course. I had forgotten. Get down as soon as you can. I can give you a bottle of good wine, Jessamer," he added, with a clumsy pretence at geniality, which flattered the confidential man anew. "We will talk things over. It is not improbable that I may leave affairs in your care for a little while. I have not had even a pretence of rest for years."

"You will forgive my presuming to notice it, sir," said Jessamer, "but I have thought you worked too hard. The opinion is not mine alone, sir, it's quite general, I assure you."

"I dare say, Jessamer, I dare say," his employer

answered with the same clumsy show of geniality as before. "We'll see about things to-night."

Mr. Jessamer, accepting this as his dismissal, went his way with uplifted heart, feeling himself indeed to be the chosen of Pharaoh. Hetheridge stayed behind to endure his own torments as he might. He dived deep into the papers which had been laid before him, and for the first time in his life felt business wholly without value as an antidote to thought. The sultry heat of the day oppressed him, though he sat with open windows and even on the lawn which sloped from his walls to the waters of the slow-gliding Thames, the air seemed confined and close. The clouds had built up everywhere, an under-root of doleful gray. There were occasional uneasy rumblings of thunder, and now and again a flash of harmless summer lightning pulsed swiftly across the clouded landscape.

Whether he strove in vain to grasp the meaning of the business papers, or read the money column of the *Times*, or wandered idly on the lawn, or sat at meals, it was all one. The changeless placid phantom clung close to his shoulder, and every passing hour seemed to make its presence more and more intolerable.

He drank heavily at dinner, trusting to obscure his thought.

"I must keep sober till I have once seen Jessamer," he thought, "and then I must drown everything."

The night was prematurely dark, and swift gusts of wind were rising. They lashed the trees which stood upon the lawn into moans of torment, which were succeeded by long pauses of brooding silence, and they laid unseen hands on door and casement, and mourned about the house as if resentful of extrusion.

"If anybody should call," he said, "as he rose from the dinner-table, 'I shall be in my own room. Put out the brandy and soda there, light the lamp, and leave out some cigars.'"

The man obeyed him and left him alone. A great blast surged up against the house and set his torn

nerves quivering with a superstitious terror at its voice. He walked to his own room through the shadows of the hall, and as he did so, for the first time, his phantom seemed to undergo a change. Eye and hand both menaced him, and in a sudden access of terror he fairly sprang into the apartment and slammed the door behind him. At that instant the bell rang, and he heard voices in the hall.

"Here at last," he thought, "thank God, is Jessamer."

Another gust of wind, fiercer than any of its precursors, burst open the French windows, and the light in the lamp flickered and went out. A vivid flash of lightning illumined lawn and river and sky for a single instant, and then the jaws of darkness did devour it up. A tremendous crash of thunder followed, and a deluge of sudden rain came swishing into the room. He struggled with the windows in the darkness, forced them back and secured them. He groped his way to the table and felt for a box of wax vestas which he remembered to have seen there. Having found it he struck a light and removed the shade and the heated lamp glass, saving his fingers from contact with it by using his handkerchief, relit the lamp, replaced the glass and shade, and slowly turned up the light.

For a mere instant he had forgotten his phantom terror, but when he raised his head he saw it standing there in flesh and blood, before him, feature for feature, hue for hue, from head to foot the same. He stared with haggard eyes and the apparition came forward. Its lips moved and it spoke.

"My name is George Redwood."

One unimaginable shock of horror struck him, and he fell upon his face.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

POTTER was the first to recover himself from the amazement excited by this strange and terrible incident. He had lingered a little outside the doorway, but though unseen had witnessed Hetheridge's fall. He dashed into the room, and lifting Hetheridge from the door, set him in a chair, and with one vigorous effort burst the insensible man's collar. The head rolled round and fell upon the breast in a ghastly semblance of death.

George stood as if rooted to the floor. In the one instant for which Hetheridge's glance of horrified recognition had endured, he read the confirmation of Dom's suspicions. The truth sprang upon him like a flash of lightning. Hetheridge, who had not seen him since he was the merest stripling, had been led by that remarkable likeness which existed between himself and his father, into the delusion that his victim had returned from the grave to reproach him with his crime. The belief shot through his soul in a mere instant of time, but from that moment doubt was impossible. Suspicion ended there. He knew.

"For God's sake, matey!" cried Potter, "lend a hand here. Don't let the man die before your eyes. Ring the bell."

George awoke from his stupor and obeyed. The man-servant came briskly in and stood appalled at the spectacle which greeted him. In his headlong fall, Hetheridge had received a cut upon the forehead and the blood from this slight wound trickled down a face awfully distorted and of a bluish pallor.

"Your master has had a paralytic stroke," said

George. "Send at once for a doctor. Is there one near at hand?"

"There are two or three close by," the man responded, staring and trembling.

"Run, man, run," commanded George. "Don't lose a second."

The man with a backward glance sped away and rushed hatless into the storm. The howling of the wind, the lashing of the rain against the uncurtained windows, the repeated thunder, and the vivid flashes of the lightning seemed a part of his own emotions, to Redwood. Otherwise he was scarcely conscious of them, and yet they added to the tumult of his mind.

Potter held his helpless head in both hands, and George, having first sprinkled Hetheridge's face, wiped away the thin, trickling stream of blood which disfigured it, and strove to force a little brandy through the clinched teeth. Many a time afterward in recalling the scene to memory, he was conscious of a crawling repugnance to himself for having so much as touched his father's murderer, but in the excitement of the time he felt nothing of this.

"Lucky we came in time to see him drop," said Potter. "He might have laid here for hours if we hadn't chanced to come in at the minute. He's breathing," he added by and by, "and his heart's beating, but that's about all you can say for him."

The slow minutes crept along, but not many had passed by when the man-servant came tearing back, soaked to the skin, his wet hair matted on his forehead. The doctor he had summoned followed close upon his heels, and after a brief examination ordered the unconscious figure to be borne upstairs. The man-servant standing to watch the doctor's preliminary observation had left a pool of water on the floor, and when Hetheridge was carried away the wet patch on the carpet deepening and brightening its red color, looked suggestive of a tragedy.

Potter lent a hand in removing the patient, and on

his return found Redwood alone seated with his face hidden in his hands and trembling like a man in an ague-fit.

"Come, Master George, pull yourself together a bit," said Sam, shaking him gently by the shoulder. "It was a shockin' thing to see, and that there's no contradictin', but there's no need to take on like this."

"You don't understand, Sam," moaned Redwood, "you don't understand."

"What don't I understand?" Sam asked.

Redwood returned no answer, and he repeated his question solicitously.

"Take no notice of me, Sam," George said, "I am not myself." He had had full time to decide that Ellice's life should never be darkened by the knowledge of her father's crime. The one man in the world who could have enlightened him as to the girl's real parentage stood at his elbow, and a word from him would have dispelled forever the cloud which then, and for so long afterward, rested upon his spirit. But that word was not fated to be spoken.

Potter, seeing how distressed he was, kept a sympathetic silence, and George occupied himself with his own thoughts. There was no fight between duty and inclination in his mind. His mother must, if possible, be spared the knowledge of the loathsome fate to which she had been invited by the stricken villain, under whose roof he sat, and it was obviously impossible to denounce the father of the girl he loved. That was as impossible as any hope of union between them. Dom's speech, which had sounded so crazy to his ears at the time of his utterance, was no more now than the sober expression of a fact. Loving her as he did, he would rather have put his hand into the fire than have asked her again to marry him. He would rather have seen her with her own hand in the fire than again have taken her to his arms. The father's sin had set up an insurmountable barrier. He knew it beyond question, and the knowledge broke his heart.

Hetheridge had been carried into the room overhead, and they could hear the footsteps of the doctor and the servant who had placed herself at his command, and could sometimes catch a murmur of their voices. In the space of half an hour the doctor descended and entered the room in which they awaited his verdict. George asked his news at once.

"The case is grave," the doctor answered. "Very grave."

"Will he recover?"

"That," returned the medical man, "is impossible to say. I believe Mr. Hetheridge is quite alone in the world. There is no one to appeal to?"

"Yes," said George. "He has a daughter, who lives at Wellsted in Essex."

"She should be communicated with at once."

"I will see to that," George answered. "I will wire to-night to my mother, who is her near neighbor, and ask her to break the news."

"I gather," said the doctor, drawing on his gloves. "I gather from the man who came to call me that you were present at the seizure. Was that so? Can you tell me anything of its nature?"

George was on his guard.

"A gust of wind had blown open the windows as I entered the room. The lamp was extinguished. Mr. Hetheridge closed the windows and relit the lamp. He was at that time apparently well and self-possessed, but at the moment at which he turned on the light, he fell forward on his face."

"And nothing occurred to shock or startle him?"

"That," said George, "I cannot tell you."

"It was like this, matey," Sam interposed. "He turned the lamp up, he stared at Master George here for half a second, and then he dropped like a pole-axed bullock."

"Excuse me," said the doctor, "but is it possible that your appearance here could in any way have startled or excited him?"



"That I cannot tell," George responded.

George, in spite of his field attire, looked like a gentleman from head to heel, and the doctor cross-examined him somewhat reluctantly, but he felt it his duty to his patient to know what he could about the case.

"You can tell me at least if the nature of the business which brought you here could in any way have been exciting to him?"

"Why, bless your soul," cried Potter, "he'd no time to know what the business was. He dropped as if he'd been shot."

"A very slight predisposing cause will sometimes act in these cases," said the doctor. "You can tell me, I suppose, if your relations with Mr. Hetheridge were amicable?"

"I was engaged," George returned, speaking with an evident effort, though nobody but himself could guess how much that effort cost him, "I was engaged, with his consent, to be married to his daughter."

"I understand your distress, sir," said the doctor, little knowing how far his understanding was from the fact. "There had been no disagreement, no withdrawal of consent, for instance?"

"None," George answered. "We had not even met since I was a mere boy."

He was bound to hide the truth. He felt he could be guilty of no blacker crime than to reveal it.

"The case," the doctor mused half to himself, "is very curious, very curious indeed. You will undertake to communicate," he asked aloud, "with Miss Hetheridge, Mr.——"

"My name is Redwood," George responded, filling up the doctor's pause.

"Thank you."

"I will communicate with Miss Hetheridge by wire to-night. I'll do so through my mother, who will break the news to her gently."

"It won't want much gentle breaking," Sam de-

clared. "He's never took the least bit of interest in the child. He's found her money in plenty, to be sure, but nothing else. She'd have had a million times the love with me and 'Tilda."

Neither of his hearers was within measurable distance of the true reading of this speech. George, though he thought he understood, was as far away as the stranger.

"Well," said the doctor, "I shall make it my business to call in Sir William Keppell. Mr. Hetheridge is a man of great wealth, and I suppose it is my duty to do my absolute best for him."

"Most certainly," George answered, finding himself appealed to. "Most assuredly."

"Then I will wire at once," said the doctor. "The storm is over, may I show you to the telegraphic office, or perhaps you know the way?"

"No," George responded, "I am a stranger here."

At this point a servant entered and announced the arrival of Mr. Jessamer.

"And who is Mr. Jessamer?" asked the doctor.

The gentleman in question presented himself at the door.

"I am Mr. Hetheridge's managing clerk," he announced advancing into the room, and looking with some surprise at its occupants. "I am here by appointment."

"I am sorry to tell you," said the doctor, "that Mr. Hetheridge is seriously and even dangerously ill."

"But not, I trust, unable to attend to business?" cried Mr. Jessamer.

"Absolutely unable," returned the doctor. "He is suffering from what is commonly called a paralytic stroke."

"Great heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Jessamer. "How sudden! How appalling! I left him this afternoon in full possession of his health and faculties. How long will it be before he is in a position to be consulted?"

"It is impossible to say at present," the doctor answered, "whether he will ever be in a position to be consulted again. Pray don't understand me as saying he will not recover. I say only that the case is one in which it is impossible to make any forecast."

"Jermyn," said Mr. Jessamer, turning to the servant, who lingered at the door, "I shall take up my quarters here for the present. I must be near Mr. Hetheridge in case of even a partial recovery. Take my portmanteau upstairs."

"Yes, Mr. Jessamer," the servant answered. "Mr. Hetheridge gave orders to have a room prepared for you this afternoon."

"It would be well to have somebody near at hand," said the doctor. "I was called in to attend the case," he explained, "and I was just about to take on myself the responsibility of wiring to Sir William Keppell."

"Oh, Sir William, by all means," cried Mr. Jessamer. "Mr. Hetheridge must have the best possible advice. And a skilled nurse, doctor. Have you thought of the skilled nurse?"

"I will wire for one at once. I am going to the telegraph office now. May I offer you my services as pilot, Mr. Redwood?"

"Thank you," answered George, languidly. His heart lay in his bosom like ice and lead—heavy, and as cold as death.

There were tattered rags of clouds still hanging in the sky, but as Redwood, Sam and the doctor emerged upon the drive the stars were shining brightly, the air was mild and balmy, and had a singular refreshment in it. The cool odors of the wet earth rose like an incense of gratitude. In the streets the kennels were still flooded and roaring toward the sewers. The doctor talked of indifferent matters as they went, rising with true professional elasticity from the memory of the gloomy horror he had left behind. If it were a doctor's business to keep in memory the sentiment of every chamber of suffering and despair he visits, the

profession of healing would welcome few aspirants and nurture still fewer practitioners.

George's message was blunt and to the point. "Hetheridge dangerously ill, perhaps dying. Break news to Ellice. He is staying at Nevada Villa, Richmond."

This bombshell did not fall into the quiet little house at Wellsted until the following morning. The widow was already in bitter anxiety about George. He had never been absent from her under such circumstances before, and she had, of course, no guess as to the nature of the business which took him from her side. She wondered in vain what could have taken him to Richmond, and what could have made him aware of Hetheridge's illness. The dreadful thought even assailed her that George might have been so angry at Hetheridge's bargain with her that he might have assaulted and dangerously injured him, and that the illness of which the telegram gave intelligence might be the result of her boy's violence. She feared this in spite of the knowledge that George was by nature a most good-tempered and amiable fellow, but she had seen him enraged at meanness, treachery, and cruelty, as his father had often been before him, and guessed an overwhelming passion, if aroused, to revenge or defend anything he loved.

Ellice received the news of Hetheridge's illness with no overwhelming grief or anxiety. It had been one of the problems of life with her which she was never tired of propounding to herself—Why did she not love her father? Her indifference to him had made her feel criminal a thousand times. There is no such enemy to peace of conscience as a good and sensitive girl at a certain period of her life. She sets herself in everything a standard of perfection, and hourly trying herself in a self-appointed court of judicature, brings in a verdict of guilty over crimes at which a male child of six would chuckle. What affection she had for her supposed father was purely of the dutiful sort. It had

no unction in it. There was nothing natural or spontaneous in her thoughts of him. No little gushes of affection at the prospect of meeting him. No fear of being parted. No delight in his presence, or in his cold and most infrequent letters. The absence of these things which lacked in her was of course attributable to her own wicked and unfilial coldness, and yet she knew that she was not cold to other people. Like Mrs. Browning's Kate, she "loved all things, men and flies." Birds and animals and children were her special friends. She had a warm heart even for the Reverend Jordan Farrell, whose conventional brain, precise demeanor, and thin nature enlisted little affection in the world at large. She had a friendly feeling for almost everybody she encountered, and only her father stood outside the pale of her affections. This was intolerably wicked, a thing to be prayed over, and wept over, but, after many years of patient doctoring, obviously past cure.

She cried at her own want of feeling, but save for accusing conscience the thought of her father's danger gave her but little pain. She would have gone to any stranger in the like distress, and would have smoothed his pillow with an equal care.

Mrs. Redwood decided to accompany her upon her journey, and so two self-accusing consciences travelled together, for do what she would, the widow could not resist a secret joy at the probability of her escape from a match, the bare thought of which had been so painful to her.

Long before their arrival at Richmond the eminent London physician had seen the patient. He, like his humbler colleague, had declined to pronounce an absolute verdict on the case, but admitted it to be dangerously critical. When Ellice met him on his second visit there were tears of self-accusation in her eyes, and here again was material for an over-sensitive conscience to work upon. She was coldly indifferent while her father lay dying, and the great London doc-

tor would imagine that she was as tenderly interested as any natural and dutiful daughter would be.

"Do you still think my father's illness dangerous?" she asked.

"It would be unwise," the eminent physician responded. "It would even be cruel not to tell you the case is serious. It is not hopeless, but I can give you no more cheering news than that. Recovery is possible. We must hope for the best. I am not in expectation of any immediate change, but the momentary indications are more favorable; a little more favorable than those of yesterday."

In brief, the man lay between life and death for weeks; the balance wavering faintly now this way, now that. At length affairs began to take a more decided course. Little by little he revived and gathered strength, and at last he was so far recovered as to be pushed about in a wheeled chair on sunny days. It was evident, however, that the prime of his life was passed for good and for all, and that no return to anything approaching to his pristine activity was possible. His mind was as much affected as his body. He could no more grasp a mental conclusion than he could walk.

During the whole period of his partial recovery Ellice had lived in practical solitude, her only companionship an aching heart. George had gone away from Richmond without seeing her. He wrote to her now and again, but his letters were hard, matter of fact and cold. They held not one word of love, and all those little touches of affectionate badinage with which the correspondence of lovers is familiar, were banished from his reluctant and scanty pages. When she reproached him with these facts, and told him in one impassioned letter that she had never so felt the need of his love as now, the poor lad wept hot tears of anguish over her words in his own room, but wrote an answer cold as charity. Whilst Ellice, in his imagination, trembled for her father's life, he felt he must

needs delay the blow which should cut asunder forever the tie that bound their hearts. He could not prevail on himself to leave England at this time, and with some difficulty, and at the risk of losing the engagement he had entered, he had deferred the acceptance of it for three months.

The news of the sick man's mending reached him when his time was nearly up, and on his receipt of it he announced to Mrs. Redwood his intention to start at once for the Continent.

"You will go to Richmond and see Ellice, first?" the mother asked.

He looked up at her with mournful eyes, which seemed caverned in his head, and gave a mere negative sign.

"George," his mother besought him, "what has happened to you? What has changed you so? You never kept any of your pleasures or troubles from me till lately, but now you tell me nothing. I see you pine and pine away. You groan in your sleep at night, dear, and I hear you walk about your room for hours. You eat nothing. You care about nothing. Ellice is breaking her heart for you. What is the matter, darling? Tell me. Surely your mother has a right to know."

"You'll think I speak in foolish riddles, dear," he answered, "but my mother is the last person in the world who ever will know."

"You have done nothing to be ashamed of, George?"

"Nothing," he answered, with an affectionate and melancholy smile. "Neither Ellice nor I am responsible for what has happened, but we shall never meet again."

"George!" cried his mother, terrified alike by his manner and his words, "I must understand you. You must explain this mystery."

"No, darling. That is the one thing in the world I must not do. I must suffer for it and break my heart about it, but I can never tell it."

"Monsieur Dom is in your confidence," cried his mother. "Oh, surely if he knows your secrets your mother may."

"The secret was his, and not mine, mother dear. We are wasting words, darling, and hurting ourselves for nothing. Things can't be changed. They can't be mended. Break the news to Ellice for me. I haven't the courage to write to her. Tell her"—his voice broke and he paused—"tell her that I never cared for her more dearly than I do in leaving her."



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

So now George was away in distant Liège, leaving his mother behind him with the news which would make a barren waste of the fair garden of his sweetheart's life. Ellice was waiting in a hardly endurable anxiety and fear, and Mrs. Redwood, with a too simple and transparent cunning, was evading the agonized entreaties the girl's letters brought her. Hetheridge was still mending slowly and was by this time able to totter across the room with the aid of a pair of walking-sticks. He had grown a great colorless beard and mustache during his confinement. His eyes, which were easily pained by broad light, were protected by a pair of goggles. With his paralytic walk, his quivering hands, his bent back, the sticks that supported him, and the heavy growth of hair about his face, the false André Dom, the murderer of George Redwood, seemed to have sprung to life again after being banished from the world for seventeen years.

But there was no one there to recognize him and he abode his time.

Ellice, in her extremity, had threatened that if Mrs. Redwood did not answer her inquiries within a week she would leave her father to his nurse and make a journey to Wellsted to demand an explanation face to face.

"If I am so unworthy," she wrote, with a natural and excusable pride, "as George's silence would seem to mean I am, in his opinion, I am willing to give him back his freedom. If he has grown to love some one else he need never be afraid that I shall afflict him by making any claim upon him. But there is a dreadful mystery somewhere, and I must and will have it

cleared in one way or another. If George has been mistaken in his feelings I must school myself to correct my own, and I feel I have the strength of mind to do it."

On the day on which the widow received this letter, and whilst her eyelids were still red with crying over it, she encountered Monsieur Dom in the main street of the town and invited him to a conference. Her feminine instinct would have taught her a more round-about approach, but as she began to speak to him her voice failed her, and she narrowly escaped betrayal into a burst of crying.

"It is about George, Monsieur Dom," she said, tremulously. "I know from his own admission that you could tell us what is dividing him from us. Oh, Monsieur Dom, if you remember your own mother, don't disguise it from me."

In her agitation she raised her veil and her imploring eyes were very hard for a tender-hearted man like Monsieur Dom to encounter.

"Madam," he returned, "I beg you to compose yourself. The street—forgive me—is no place for the discussion of this matter."

"Come to my house, Monsieur Dom," she besought him.

"Instantly, dear lady," Dom responded. "Instantly."

She walked trembling beside him and said nothing more until they were safe in her own parlor. Then with clasped hands she leaned toward him, a moving figure for any man susceptible to pity. Years of suffering had purified and spiritualized a face which had always been good and tender, and had left it beautifully eloquent of pain and patience. The traces of a grief more recent made it purely pathetic, and the good little Dom yearned pitifully over her and knew that he was powerless to give help or comfort.

"You have known my boy for years," she began. "I have always thought you loved him. Everybody

says you have a good heart, Monsieur Dom. There is some dreadful secret killing him, forcing him away from me, and parting him from Ellice, from Miss Hetheridge. You knew that they were going to be married? You know what his secret is, Monsieur Dom. Tell me, for pity's sake! How can we fight against it if we don't know what it is?"

"Madam," Dom answered, easily moved. "I regret that you put yourself to so much pain. For myself I do not speak for I have a hard old shell and I do not matter much to anybody, but you ask what I cannot do. I am helpless, dear lady."

"You can help me, Monsieur Dom," she urged. "I have it on George's own admission that you know his secret."

"If I withdraw from this interview, dear madam, believe me it is that I may spare you pain. I can tell you nothing."

"But you know," she cried, fawning on him. "You know!"

"Yes, madam," he answered, solemnly, "I know, and your son knows. It is bad enough as it is. You see what the knowledge has done for him. His life is wrecked and broken. You do not guess what you ask. You have suffered much in your time—terribly I know. But if I dared to tell you what you wish to know, if I were brute and beast enough to tell you, you would find the knowledge as hard to bear as anything you have endured. Thank God, madam, that you are spared that knowledge."

"But George? What has he done that he should suffer so?"

"George has done what any man in his place would have been compelled to do. He suffers, but he is not to blame."

"But why should marriage be impossible between him and Ellice? What has she done?"

"Nothing, madam. She is as good as an angel, but there is no help for it."

Monsieur Dom, in fine, though he mopped his eyes and blew his nose in undisguised emotion, was quite obdurate, and would not yield a jot to her entreaties. The sense of mystery, added to the pain of separation, and to see all hope and happiness slipping away without being able to guess why or wherefore was bitter in the extreme. She wrote that day to George a final appeal, and inclosed Ellice's letter. Four days later his answer reached her.

"MY DEAREST MOTHER :—There is no use in beating about the bush. What you ask is impossible. It is no fault of Ellice's and it is no fault of mine, but we are parted forever. If I could tell you why, you would see how true it is. Since I dare not tell you anything, you must believe me without evidence. Ellice suggests in her letter to you that I may have unworthy thoughts about her, or that somebody else may have come in between her and me, and supplanted her in my affection. I never loved her so much as I do now. I shall never think of another girl, and I know that my love will last my life-time. If I could ever be quite sure that she had forgotten me and was happy, I think it would help to make me more contented. And now I must beg of you never again to return to this subject. I have written my last word about it, and nobody will ever know what it cost me to say good-by."

This looked uncompromising enough, but its very finality aroused a combat of sense in the mother's mind. It brought to her in fact something very like the courage of despair, and she resolved almost on the instant that she would journey to Liège, see George there, and never leave him until she had either persuaded him to return to his allegiance, or had wrested his secret from him. She decided to see Ellice first, to inform her of her resolution, and to bid her be of good cheer.

Having once made up her mind to this course, she shut her eyes with true womanly obstinacy to the difficulties of her mission, and, *coute que coute*, determined that she would succeed. George could not, and would not, resist her personal entreaties.

She made hasty preparations for the journey, and

arranged, if need were, to be a month away. She put the servants on board wages, advised some two or three of her friends of her intended absence, and on the following day set out for Richmond by way of London.

The task of nursing and the pain and suspense of her lover's silence had worn Ellice down considerably. She was thin and pale and languid, and Mrs. Redwood was newly fired to valor in her cause and George's as she observed these symptoms. She poured out her purpose in one vehement, maternal torrent.

"I am going to Belgium, darling. I shall take to-morrow evening's mail, and on the following day I shall be at Liège. I shall see George, and I shall never leave his side until I know from him what keeps him silent."

"He has forgotten me," Ellice said bitterly, though her eyes filled and her lips trembled.

"No, no, my darling," cried the widow. "He has not forgotten you. He loves you better than ever. I have his own written word for it. His letter came only yesterday. And I know George better, far better than you, my dear. He is incapable of deceit. He never told me a lie in his life-time. No, my darling, you may be sure that George is true. He loves you dearly, and you love him, don't you, Ellice? And while that's true there is nothing, nothing, nothing that can really come between you. I shall bring George back with me. I shall make him tell me what his trouble is, and I shall bring him back with me. I can't bear that either of you should be unhappy. You never knew a mother of your own, dear, and my heart fastened to you when you were no higher than the table. Next to George, I love you better than anybody in the world. Don't cry, Ellice. I shall bring him back again."

In the face of all this impetuous confidence, it seemed hard to disbelieve, and to Mrs. Redwood's

mind, though she could not shake away an inward premonition of failure, it seemed easy for the moment to scorn all doubts, however deep-rooted and instinctive.

"Show me his letter, mamma," Ellice pleaded.

"No, dear," the widow answered. "I shall not do that yet, for it would only pain you. I will read you one passage from it, if you will promise not to ask to see more."

She drew the letter from her bosom and read.

"Ellice suggests in her letter to you that I may have unworthy thoughts about her, or that somebody else may have come in between her and me and supplanted her in my affection. I never loved her so much as I do now. I shall never think of another girl, and I know that my love will last my life-time."

She did not change a word of her son's writing, but a more unjust synopsis of a document was never offered. The deceptive extract, however, lent the girl new courage and more than renewed all her old tenderness for her lover.

"So long as that is true," she asked, "what can it matter what happens? We can wait until this dreadful mystery, whatever it is, is cleared away. We are young and we have our lives before us."

She spoke of the mystery with a genuine lightness. So long as George loved her, it could have no real terrors for her.

"Trust it all to me, Ellice," cried Mrs. Redwood. "I will arrange everything. I will never leave him until I bring him back to you."

It was really marvellous to see how, under these cheering and encouraging words, the girl brightened and blossomed to her old self again. The color came back to her pale cheeks and lips. Her eye brightened and the drooping listless carriage of her body was changed to an air of youth and elasticity a thousand times more proper and becoming to her years.

"Mamma," she cried, embracing the widow, and

laying her head upon that friendly bosom, "I thought I should never be happy any more. But I am, dear, and I owe it to your goodness. Thank you, dear, and bless you a hundred, hundred times."

She kissed the bearer of good tidings rapturously, and Mrs. Redwood submitted to and returned her caresses with a sharp inward sting of reproach. Ellice had never truly shown her heart till now, and the widow read the signs so truly that she trembled for the success of her scheme. To have lifted such a despair to such a height of hope, only to dash it down again was a cruelty from which her whole nature shrank, and yet in spite of herself she feared that she had been guilty of it.

"You shall see what you shall see," she said, with an assumed confidence and cheerfulness, though she felt like a traitoress all the time. "And now tell me your own news. How is your father? What does Sir William Keppell think of his condition?"

"My father has improved beyond hope," Ellice answered. "He can actually walk again, and to-day he was out for five minutes on the lawn, quite unsupported. But I am afraid," she added, "that his mind is gone. There is one very singular thing about him. He often speaks in French, and that is all the more strange, because I always thought he never knew a word of the language. Years ago, when I was quite a little thing, I wrote to him in French, to show him how I was getting on under Madame Blois, and I remember quite distinctly that he said he had had to have mine translated. 'You must write to me in future,' he said, 'in a language I can understand.'"

"He may have learned it since, dear," suggested Mrs. Redwood. "I have heard him talk more than once of having to go on business to Paris."

"Yes," insisted Ellice; "but the strange thing is, that he speaks with quite a country accent, and so perfectly. When I was in Province two years ago with Mrs. Blois and Mrs. Farrell, I used to listen to

the country people and try to imitate them. They have a language of their own which I could not understand at all, but when they spoke French they had exactly the same accent my father has."

"I dare say," said Mrs. Redwood, "that he studied with somebody who came from that part of France."

"That does seem the natural explanation," Ellice admitted, "but it is surprising that he should have learned in middle life to speak so perfectly. He knows the local *patois* too," she added brightly, "for I picked up some phrases of it, and when I used them to him he understood and answered. I think his mind seems livelier afterward. It was just like striking a chord on a dumb piano and getting an unexpected sound from it."

"Do the doctors say that he will ever be quite well again?"

"They are very guarded," said Ellice. "Sir William Keppell is always on his guard. I never knew a man so unwilling to hazard an opinion. Nobody, I am sure, could ever say that he was wrong, and there can't be many people who can be quite certain that they have known to be right. He is very tall, and dignified, and courtly—and cadaverous. He reminds me of a Catholic cardinal more than anything. Of course he must be a very clever man to be so trusted, but when I question him I feel as if I were looking at a blank wall. He is an oracle who never answers anybody."

Under the inspiring influence Mrs. Redwood had lent her, the girl went back to her old vivacity and prattled charmingly. The widow allowed herself to catch the infection and hoodwinked herself from her own secret sense of guilt. They passed an evening actually happy and hopeful to one, and with a simulated hopefulness and happiness on the side of the other. Mrs. Redwood shared Ellice's couch that night, and the girl lay in her arms rosy and blooming, and smiling even in her sleep. The widow bent over her



and watched her by the faint glimmer of the night light with an aching remorse and a growing sense of the certainty of coming defeat. In the silent watches of the night facts took the stern complexion which belonged to them. She saw George's careworn face again and the tender-hearted Dom's tear-blotted visage and read them truly.

George was not a child any longer to be coaxed or chidden. He knew his own heart, and she was certain that the letter from which she had read that deceptive passage expressed his final conclusion on a matter of such importance to himself that he dare not trifle with it. Her thoughts strayed far in pursuit of the inexorable mystery which severed her child from happiness, and yet, if she had only known it, it lay incarnate in the next chamber. For the first time in her life she lay under the same roof with her husband's murderer, and on the morrow she was to start upon a journey of hundreds of miles in vain search of the secret which slumbered in his guilty breast.

She slept at last, and in her dreams the mystery had vanished after some fashion altogether dreamlike, and the young lovers whom she loved so tenderly were reunited. The delight of dreams is vain, but even their foolish solace is something.

When she arose in the morning she was as prepared for failure as she had been hysterically resolved upon success at her last waking, but she put an heroic face on matters, and bore her despair so bravely that Ellice suspected nothing.

"I must leave you at five o'clock, dear," the widow said at breakfast, "or I shall miss the night mail. You must not be alarmed or downcast if you don't hear from me for a day or two. No news is good news. You will be brave and patient."

She had lured the child into a fool's paradise, and now it seemed not only the most cowardly thing, and therefore the easiest, but even the kindest and most merciful, to leave her in it.

"I will be as brave and patient as I can, dear," Ellice answered. "You have given me new life and hope. After what you read to me last night I feel that I have no right to be afraid of anything."

She blushed delightfully as she spoke, but she had made her confession already, and there was something delicious in having a confidante to whom she could express herself with perfect certainty of sympathy.

As it happened, it was Sir William Keppell's day, and that courtly and accomplished gentleman came early so as to allow himself time for his multifarious town affairs. By eleven o'clock he would be back to receive a score of patients, and at two o'clock was due at his hospital for an operation of unusual intricacy and danger. He walked straight to his patient's room, spent five minutes with him, and descended to find himself encountered in the hall by Ellice.

"Do you find an improvement to-day, Sir William?" she asked him.

"There is no falling back at least," Sir William answered. "The great thing to be dreaded is relapse."

"Mr. Jessamer is here very often and is very anxious to be allowed to see him."

"Mr. Jessamer?" inquired Sir William. "Ah, yes, I remember. Mr. Jessamer is your father's confidential man. He may be allowed to see him in a purely friendly way, but not a hint of business."

"Mr. Jessamer is very anxious," Ellice pursued. "Might I perhaps venture to send him to your house, Sir William? He would, of course, obey your orders."

"Yes," said Sir William; "you may send him to me. Tell him when next he calls to come to me."

On the instant came a ring at the bell, and the manservant who stood at the door in readiness for the distinguished physician's exit opened it. Mr. Jessamer presented himself in person.

"I have run down, Miss Hetheridge," he said, standing bareheaded before her, "to inquire for news of your respected father's health. I am anxious, indeed

I am most supremely anxious, to know when I shall be able to communicate with him."

"Sir William Keppell will tell you," Ellice answered.

Sir William, for once in his life at least, offered a distinct opinion.

"I cannot, under any circumstances, allow Mr. Hetheridge to be approached with any business matter at present."

"There are large interests at stake, Sir William," suggested Mr. Jessamer. "A single word from Mr. Hetheridge would discharge me from a grave responsibility."

"We must have patience, my dear sir," returned Sir William.

He and Mr. Jessamer left the house together, and Ellice returned to her visitor.

"Have you had good news, my dear?" Mrs. Redwood asked her.

"You said last night that no news was good news," Ellice responded. "Sir William sees nothing unfavorable since his last visit, and that is something. The case can hardly stand quite still, and if there is no falling back there may be some improvement. At any rate the ground he has gained has not been lost again."

The day turned out warm and sunlit, and at about noon Ellice, who had left Mrs. Redwood for a while to wait upon her father, descended radiant.

"I am sure," she said, "that he is better this morning. He has never seemed so bright and intelligent since his seizure. He is going to walk on the lawn again. Perhaps he had better not see you, for he is not accustomed to your face and is very easily startled. I am afraid you will hardly know him, for he is terribly bent and broken. I am sure that his own daughter might have passed him in the streets. Listen. The servants are carrying him downstairs now. Wait here a moment. I will come back to you directly."

She left the room, and Mrs. Redwood, full of curiosity and pity, concealed herself behind the curtain of

the French window, and waited for his appearance on the lawn.

"You are quite sure that you can walk alone, dear?" she heard Ellice asking. The reply was voiceless. "Don't you think you had better trust yourself to my arm?" the girl went on.

The French windows were wide open to the mild mid-day autumn air, but the listener caught no murmur of reply. She effaced herself behind the curtains and watched. A bent and tottering figure, leaning forward on two sticks, came into sight. Her heart gave one awful leap, and then seemed to stand still. The quivering figure turned, and the bearded face with the eyes shadowed by a pair of great blue goggles came into view.

A wild shriek tore the air.

"Help! help!"

She was upon him like a tigress, gripping the powerless wretch with both hands by the collar.

"You murderer!" she gasped. "You murderer! At last! After all these years! Help, help, help!"

Ellice was tearing at her hands, but in her frenzy she knew nothing, but screamed the louder and shook the miserable image in her grip.

"You will kill him," cried Ellice. "You will kill him. Father, father." At that word Mrs. Redwood released her hold and Hetheridge's relaxed figure fell huddled on the lawn.

"I know everything now," she whispered in an awful voice and with a face of stony horror. "I can see it all. Oh, Ellice, my child, your heart must break. This marriage can never, never be."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

THE whole scene was enacted in a few seconds, and Ellice was its sole witness. The household, alarmed by Mrs. Redwood's cries, ran out upon the lawn, but arrived too late to know more than that the master of the house lay helpless, and that the two women were standing near him, looking on each other with faces of complete dismay. The natural conclusion was that Hetheridge had experienced a second stroke of paralysis. The helpless figure was carried upstairs, and laid upon the bed. One of the men-servants ran immediately for the doctor, and the other waited by his master's side. The trained nurse, the cook, and the housemaid busied themselves about the sick man with useless restoratives.

Downstairs a strange and terrible scene took place meanwhile. Mrs. Redwood and Ellice saw Hetheridge borne away, and then turned once more to face each other. The girl was trembling from head to foot, and her eyes were wide with terror. The widow returned her gaze for one speechless moment, and then fell upon her neck with convulsive tears. Suddenly, in the midst of wild caresses and broken moans of pity, Mrs. Redwood started back with a faint shriek.

"Don't come near me," she cried, with a gesture of abhorrence. "His flesh and blood! How could I bear to touch you?"

"Mamma," cried the girl. "What is it? Am I mad? Or are we mad together?"

"Don't call me by that name," said Mrs. Redwood, sternly. She shuddered with an intense repulsion, and covering her eyes with her hands, ran from her into the house. Ellice rested herself for a moment,

stupefied, and then recovering the power of motion, followed her.

The widow sat upon a couch wringing her hands and moaning.

"Mamma," Ellice cried, seizing the agonized hands and throwing herself upon her knees, "you must tell me, you shall tell me. What was it you called my father?"

Mrs. Redwood fell upon her knees beside the terrified girl, and embraced her anew, crying in a broken voice that it was no fault of hers.

"No fault of yours, my dear, no fault of yours. Forgive me. For the moment I couldn't bear you. God have mercy! I might have married him."

"Mamma," said Ellice, in a horror-stricken whisper, "you called him——"

Her lips refused to shape the word.

"I called him, murderer," cried Mrs. Redwood.

The girl slipped swiftly from her and closed the windows.

"Hush! What do you mean?"

"Ellice, you must never look on that man's face again, or touch his hand again."

"What has he done? Tell me." She was excited almost to frenzy, and kneeling before the widow once more, she fawned piteously, caressing and imploring, "Tell me, what has he done?"

"Ellice," said the widow, "your father is my husband's murderer."

At these awful words a low moan escaped the girl and she half-swooned, but recovered herself by a great effort.

"Oh, think of what you say," she cried. "How can you know to-day what you have never guessed for all these years?"

"It was he who killed my husband," the widow answered. "There is no mistake, no possibility of mistake. I should have known him as I saw him to-day amongst a thousand. I understand it all now,

George knows it, Monsieur Dom knows it. It is because of this that George has ceased to write to you."

Little by little Mrs. Redwood's certainty forced conviction upon Ellice's mind, although she fought against it, as she would have resented the temptation to commit a crime. If Dom entertained the same belief as Mrs. Redwood, she saw clearly that it was her duty to encounter him. At any cost to herself, she must know the truth, and if the suspicion were true no tie of fatherhood could bind her any longer to a criminal so monstrous. If Hetheridge had even held, or had even feigned an affection for her, the girl's feelings toward him at this supreme crisis of her fate would have been widely different. A daughter who had been taught to love and revere her father would have suffered more, but would still have clung to the criminal even when guilt was clear. But ever since the time of her earliest memories he had treated her with coldness, and had met her proffers of affection with imperturbable disdain. They had been separated by long intervals of time, and he was no more a father to her heart than he was in reality. There was no compulsion of love to hold him dear in spite of his wickedness, and the girl was in passionate revolt against him. His very generosity toward her in the one matter of mere money made an added burden upon her, and she loathed every possession that had come to her through his hands. The fiendish callousness which had permitted her to be brought up side by side with the son of his victim, astounding cynicism which had permitted a contract of marriage to be entered into between George Redwood and herself, seemed to her to transcend even the murder in its complete abandonment to villany. The very clothes she wore were loathsome since his money had purchased them. Her trinkets and rich curios, even her beloved books, had suddenly grown hateful. Her one impulse was to know the truth, to be sure beyond doubt or chance of refutation, and then to set the width of the world between herself

and the monster whose name she bore, and whose blood as she believed ran in her veins.

She wept so long and so passionately that Mrs. Redwood was alarmed for her, but after the passage of some hours she grew calm from sheer exhaustion.

Both in Ellice's mind and Mrs. Redwood's, one thought was dominant. It was impossible for either of them to rest beneath the roof which sheltered Hetheridge.

"My darling," said the widow, when the girl was at last restored to a semblance of outward tranquillity, "I can't bear to leave you, but if I stayed in this house I should go mad."

"And so should I," cried Ellice. "Let us go away at once. Let us go back to Wellsted. Let us see Monsieur Dom together, and if this thing be true, I must go away, far away from everybody who has ever known me. Oh, I am hateful to myself. If I knew what part of me was his, I would burn it away from me."

Another wild burst of tears followed these words, but it was of much less duration than the first. She was too tired and too miserable to feel her grief keenly, except by flashes. She had no sooner received a partial self-possession than she went hastily to her own room and began to pack—her mind fixed on immediate flight. Mrs. Redwood assisted her, and was in turn assisted by her. Half an hour's swift and noiseless work completed their preparations, and the luggage by Ellice's orders was being carried into the hall, when an urgent and excited summons sounded at the door.

Jessamer presented himself anew, pale and excited. "I beg your pardon for disturbing you, Miss Hetheridge," he began, addressing Ellice, who, already attired for her journey, stood in the hall watching the transport of the luggage. "I cannot, of course, venture to intrude upon your father, but there are matters of most urgent importance at the office—matters which I do not understand at all."



"In what way can I serve you, Mr. Jessamer?" she asked him, coldly.

"It is possible," he answered, "that there are papers in your father's possession which, if I could have access to them, would teach me what to do. I am absolutely at a loss, and the consequences of Mr. Hetheridge's indisposition may be grave. They may even be disastrous."

"Mr. Hetheridge is far worse than when you left the house this morning," she answered with a cold self-possession, surprising to herself.

"He has had a relapse?" questioned Jessamer. "A new attack?"

"Yes," she answered. "He has had a relapse."

"But the keys, Miss Hetheridge, are in his possession. If I could only be permitted to make a search among his papers. Under ordinary circumstances I would not presume——"

He was evidently in a state of great excitement. His hands, his lips, his voice, all trembled.

"Is it so grave?" she asked.

"Miss Hetheridge," he returned, laying his tremulous right hand on his breast, "I am not exaggerating when I say that it may mean ruin. I beg you to believe me when I tell you that I would not speak in this way to any person in the world except yourself, but unless I can find instructions with respect to three separate matters, each of great moment, to-morrow will see the loss of hundreds of thousands of pounds."

"I do not know," she answered, "where Mr. Hetheridge keeps his papers, but if the case is as you describe it——"

"It is indeed," he interjected.

"I will give you the keys," she continued, "and you may search for what you stand in need of."

"On the night on which Mr. Hetheridge was struck down," he told her, "I was under orders to meet him here and to take instructions from him. He was contemplating taking a holiday, and proposed to leave me

in complete charge of his affairs. When I arrived there were a number of documents lying on the table in his room, and I think it probable that they referred to the matters now in hand."

"I can find you those papers," she answered, "they were given in my charge by one of the servants on my arrival here."

She left him for a moment and returned with the documents he asked for. They were the last things Hetheridge had handled before the shock, which seemed to her mind the long-deferred punishment of Heaven, had fallen upon him. She conquered a dreadful repugnance before she brought herself to handle them.

"Excuse me," said Jessamer, "if I look at these at once."

She inclined her head in assent, and drawing up a chair to the table, he made a hasty survey of the papers, and ended by looking up with a face whiter and more disturbed than ever.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered, "but might I beg the favor of a little brandy? I—I trust you will not think me rude, Miss Hetheridge, but really I am overcome."

Ellice rang the bell, and instructing the servant who answered it to attend to Mr. Jessamer, left the room. She was deeply veiled to conceal her features, which were swollen and discolored with her tears. Jessamer had not seen her face throughout the interview, and he thought her singularly cool and firm beneath the news he had been compelled to bring her.

"She takes it well," he said to himself, "but it will make a difference to her if things turn out as they threaten. Here's fifty thousand in the gutter, anyhow, and if I'd only known I could have found a buyer yesterday and saved one-half of it."

The servant brought him the brandy he had called for, and he poured out nearly half a tumbler, filled up the glass with water, and drank it hastily. Then he

skimmed the paper anew, and finally nodding his head resignedly, with a great sigh he murmured to himself——

"If this doesn't mean the biggest crash the world has seen this year, I'm a Dutchman."

He knew the worst now, and his excitement was over. The plain English of the matter was that Hetheridge had bought stocks in a rising market, and had timed himself to sell before the fall. His own keen and practiced eye had been withdrawn. No note of his own prescience had been sounded, and in the three months over which his illness had extended, a financial panic had swept over the country, and the fortune of John Hetheridge had foundered in the storm.

He had read the sign of the times aright, and by a double *coup* had prepared to himself to triple his already vast fortune. He had bought everywhere an artificially inflated stock, buoying it still further up by his own huge transactions. He had already made arrangements to unload in small parcels on every bourse in Europe and America, and when the fall came, accented like the rise, by the magnitude of his own operations, he had planned to watch it to its lowest, and repurchase. The device was as common daylight, and only the enormous sums involved in the transactions made it in any way remarkable.

Had the shock which robbed him of his faculties befallen him any other year of his business life, its financial effects would have touched him but lightly. Falling now, it meant ruin, simple and absolute.

Mr. Jessamer was as yet the only man aware of this, and now that certainty had succeeded to fear, he went calmly back to London, spent his evening in the usual fashion at the suburban club he most frequented, and went to bed at night with a quiet conscience. He had saved a few thousands, had Mr. Jessamer; he was highly respected in the City; and would have but little difficulty in securing a position whose emolument would

at least be equal to that of the post he was about to lose.

John Hetheridge had gained no man's liking, and the one man in the world to whom he had extended a partial confidence saw the majestic fabric which the cunning of a life had reared crumble into nothing without a sigh for the architect. It is certain that Mr. Jessamer grieved a little, but he grieved for the edifice, and mighty little for the builder of it.

Long before Hetheridge had recovered consciousness Mrs. Redwood and Ellice were on their way to Wellsted. Arrived there, they sought an interview with Monsieur Dom, and added one more certainty to his list. The meeting was intensely painful to all concerned, but the two women had already experienced the first horror of the discovery, and by dint of great effort they passed through the ordeal with a semblance of composure. It was arranged that Monsieur Dom should communicate the last discovery to George, and should insist on his immediate return to England to decide the course to be adopted.

George came post haste, but Ellice was purposely kept in ignorance of his return. He and his mother met at Dom's house, in the room in which the lover had received his first hint of the bar which existed between his sweetheart and himself. The stain of the wine was still visible on the carpet, and George and Dom exchanged meaning glances over it.

"Except for Miss Hetheridge," said George, "we three are the only people in the world who have the remotest guess about the truth of this matter." He was extremely pale and worn, but in manner resolute—and even a little stern, his mother thought. The suffering of the last few months had aged him in appearance by a dozen years, and he took a tone of authority. "I have never seen from the first," he continued, "more than one possibility. The villain has gone free all these years, and, so far as we are concerned, he must go free still. Any one of us would

have suffered anything gladly if the truth could have been hidden from Miss Hetheridge. Unfortunately she knows it now, but we cannot inflict upon her the stigma of her father's crime. For my own part I leave him in the hands of God. He is near his end, and may never rise from his bed. He is bankrupt, and serious charges of fraud are hanging over him."

"Bankrupt? Fraud!" his mother and Dom echoed together.

"Yes," he affirmed, "the news was in last evening's paper. I heard it discussed in the railway carriage as I came here."

"We undertake a grave responsibility," said Dom, "in allowing this man to go undenounced. I have made myself acquainted with the law, and it is right that we should all understand that we are answerable."

"I understand that fully," George responded, "but what good end shall we serve by the publication of the truth? The man is ruined and dying. The knowledge of his crime has broken his daughter's heart already. Is it for us to strike a still heavier blow against her?"

"Not for me, George," the widow answered.

"It is for you to decide," said Dom, "and for me to obey your decision. You decide on silence?"

"I decide on silence," George replied.

"You are right, George," said the widow, "let us leave him in the hands of God."

The news that the great house known as Hetheridge & Co. had stopped payment was by this time everywhere, and in Wellsted, where everybody knew the bankrupt by reputation, the excitement awakened by the intelligence was as great as in financial circles in London. His daughter's life-long residence in the town had made the millionaire a property of Wellsted, as it were, and everybody felt more or less interested in his money. The news went through the place like wild-fire, but quite naturally the Reverend Jordan Farrell's household was the last it arrived at.

The reverend gentleman heard the news at Weybridge Hall, and at once felt it to be his duty to break it to his guest. Since her return, Ellice had been almost a prisoner in her bedroom. The knowledge which had been forced upon her had so wounded her that she felt incapable of association with the world. A touch of the tendered hand, the sound of the most familiar voice brought her an almost intolerable pain.

The day had already faded into evening, when a knock sounded at her bedroom door, and her maid entered bearing Mr. Farrell's compliments and his particular request that she would see him for a few minutes on a matter of most urgent importance. She dismissed the girl with a promise to descend, but lingered for a little time before she could overcome her own repugnance. When she obeyed the summons she found the clergyman in his study walking with a somewhat embarrassed air, up and down before the fire.

"My dear young lady," he began, taking her by both hands, "I am the bearer of unwelcome news, and it wounds me to deliver it. Pray be seated."

He felt this to be a clumsy and abrupt beginning, and his consciousness made him still more *mal adroit*.

"Your youth," he said, "has enjoyed many advantages. I have thought sometimes that those advantages might be minimized by the temptations they carry with them, but I am happy to believe that you have remained unspoiled by that—ere—plethora of worldly goods which has—ere—attended you upon your path through life."

"If you have ill news, Mr. Farrell," said Ellice, "pray tell it me at once."

"I trust," said the Reverend Jordan Farrell, "that you will be able to receive it with a Christian fortitude. I trust that the maxims with which I have so long labored to impregnate your mind may be of service to you."

"Pray let me know your news, Mr. Farrell," she interrupted again.

"I am coming to it," returned the clergyman. "Happiness, my dear young lady, is not only found in association with great wealth. Even the poor enjoy it—ere—occasionally. I have myself lived a life of labor. My emoluments have at no time been extravagant, and yet I have felt consolation in the midst of a career which has not been, in a financial sense, too prosperous, in the temptation of duties performed with ardor."

"Pray let me know your news, Mr. Farrell," she besought him anew. She sat in an inward agony of terror, and awaited the accusation which she believed was coming. "Tell me at once. I can bear anything now, but suspense."

"Your father's circumstances," pursued Farrell, who had been tortuous and polysyllabic all his life, "were such as to justify the natural conclusion that you would always be liberally provided without any necessity for the exercise of those faculties of self-abnegation which are necessary in amassing a great pecuniary fortune—your father's circumstances, I say, were such as to inspire you with a natural belief that you would always continue to enjoy those advantages of wealth and worldly position by which you have been surrounded ever since the charge of your education first devolved upon me. This, I regret to inform you, my dear young lady, is not so. Your father's illness, and the prolonged absence from business which it has necessitated, have had a most unfortunate and most unforeseen result. His affairs, I regret to say, are hopelessly involved. The house of John Hetheridge & Co. have suspended payment."

"Is that all?" she cried, rising, and standing with clasped hands before him. She had feared something so much worse than the loss of fortune, that the mere news of business ruin was a relief to her.

"That is all," he answered, "but it is enough. I am sorry to add that the failure is complete and total. I gather from Mr. Weybridge, who has returned from

town to-day, that the deficit may justly be described as enormous. It is anticipated that the balance of claims, in excess of assets, will reach two millions."

She resumed her seat, so plainly relieved that her demeanor filled the reverend gentleman with astonishment.

"That means, Mr. Farrell," she asked, "that I shall have to be dependent upon my own exertions?"

"No, my dear young lady," he responded. "It does not mean that, whilst I can offer you the shelter of my roof. I have not dared, hitherto, Miss Hetheridge, to testify to you, openly, the esteem and affection with which you are regarded in my household. I could not even seem to seek a friend in the mammon of unrighteousness, but I can tell you now, my dear——"

He stooped awkwardly to caress her, with a bony and ungentle hand, and his formal voice shook a little as he spoke.

"Your grace, and beauty, and goodness, have made our home happy to Mrs. Farrell and myself, and to our children for many years. We have learned, my dear, to love you and to esteem you." He began to cry outright, and Ellice for the first time since her childhood threw her arms about him, and laid her head upon his breast. The poor man did nothing gracefully, and even in the pathos of the situation an on-looker could not have failed to find something grotesque, and, perhaps, laughable. "There is always a home for you here, my dear," he concluded, disengaging himself. "Always a house for you here."

"Thank you," she cried with all her heart. "Thank you a thousand times, Mr. Farrell, but I shall never be a burden to my friends."

He strove to persuade her, but he strove in vain.

Since she had known the truth, the one desire of her soul had been to rid herself of every gift which had come to her from her father's guilty hands, and here was the way to her wish made clear, as if by an act of Providence. She would have parted instantly with



everything had she but been able to find an excuse for doing so apart from the secret which corroded all her thoughts.

Whilst this scene was enacting, George Redwood, unseen, was prowling about the house, and taking a silent farewell of Ellice. As he stood there, looking his last at the little window where he had so often watched her candle burning, gust after gust of hate and rage passed through him, and shook him to the centre. He would have given anything he had, or could now hope for, to square accounts with the man who had murdered his father, and whose crime had left his life a wreck. "Good-by," he murmured brokenly. "Good-by, for good and all."

He could forego anything and everything rather than let a further harm befall that sore-wounded heart. The young and ardent feel thus at times, thank Heaven, and he would rather have perished than wantonly have hurt one hair of that sacred head.

## CHAPTER XXX.

WHEN Redwood had received the letter in which Dom informed him of his mother's knowledge of the truth, he had at once hastened to his employers to ask for leave of absence. The permit was given, all the more readily since the firm had need of his services in their London establishment. He was bidden, so soon as the urgent private affairs which took him away should be arranged, to enter upon an employment which would cost him some two months of time. He went to his work sick at heart, but resolute. Life was savorless, flavorless, without color. He did his duty doggedly in spite of all, and in the mean time, an event was preparing which set him in a position perhaps unique in the history of mankind. A position so terrible and strange, that whilst it lasted it made the sorrows he had already endured seem trivial in comparison.

To the amazement of everybody about him, Hetheridge began to mend again. Mind and nerve were alike so blunted, that the shock of actual discovery and denunciation came upon him with infinitely less effect than might have been predicted. He had swooned in Mrs. Redwood's grasp and had lain long unconscious, but on his return to a knowledge of the things around him, his medical men discovered to their surprise that there had been no second paralytic seizure. He was shaken and weakened, and it might be that his recovery was indefinitely retarded, but the symptoms to be most dreaded were but little aggravated. Sir William Keppell gave it as his opinion that his patient's fall upon the lawn was due to vertigo induced

by over-exertion, and the suburban practitioner respectfully followed in his train.

Hetheridge's mind, during the weeks that followed, affords a curious study. He remembered everything that had passed, and from hour to hour and from day to day, he expected the open denunciaſion of his crime, but how it had come about that he had been recognized after all that lapse of years, he did not guess. He had been washed and dressed day by day by his attendants, and had not seen his own image in a glass from the moment when that damning likeness to his old disguise had begun to steal upon him. Had he been in full possession of his faculties, his instinct of caution would have taught him better than to permit himself to return to the similitude of the false André Dom, who had murdered Ellice Redmond's husband. But his thoughts were all clouded and undefined. They had no distinct and definite boundary, and they melted, as it were, one into the other, changing confusedly, so that whilst he peered dimly at one idea, he would find himself suddenly confronted with another which in no way resembled it, and perplexed him with the strangeness of its aspect. In a sense, this mental condition was favorable to recovery, for it robbed all his sensations of their poignancy and gave his shattered nerves repose. Nothing seemed to matter very much to him. The worst had happened already. The unseen image which had so long haunted him had at last declared itself, and in that instant he had tasted the pains of hell. All the punishment his undetected crime had brought him, the slow years of unrepentant dread, the remorseless accusation of the ghost that tracked him, had seemed as if gathered into one appalling and overwhelming avalanche of agony. There are things, for the expression of which the human vocabulary is inadequate, and the extremest words after all express no more than averages. The stupendous force of the blow which struck him, the earthquake rending of the soul with fear in that swift point of time in which it

fell, the hideous and instantaneous rout of every vital force within him—all these things are properly indescribable. They are outside the realm and sway of words, and even the imagination conceives them feebly.

He learned by and by in a dim uninterested way that he was ruined. That mattered as little as anything and everything else to him. The visits of Sir William Keppell ceased without explanation on the side of that expensive physician, or curiosity on Hetheridge's. When, after a space of five weeks, the walks about the lawn were resumed, he found that two of his servants had discharged themselves and had taken flight in search of an unbroken master. Jessamer came to see him and had an interview in which he set forth the irremediable character of the crash. Hetheridge heard and understood, and accepted the understanding with an indifference which looked astounding to any one who had not the key to his mind. All his books and papers were in the hands of a firm of accountants, and his creditors were awaiting their report and the sick man's recovery. The failure had carried wide-spread ruin with it, and a dozen firms had gone down like so many houses of cards. Jessamer was full of it all, and it possessed him with a sense of importance and personal merit which he had never felt before. There had been no such panic in the financial world of London for the past five years, and Jessamer enjoyed all the dignity pertaining to it and experienced none of the attendant pains and penalties. He swelled in a sort of awe-struck exaltation, and savored his own importance with a relishing nostril. His employer's indifference had to Jessamer's mind something almost impious in it. He seemed careless of his own dignity. To be the supremest bankrupt of that decade, and to have no pride in it!

One or two local tradesmen had hurried freely in with petty claims which were not even flea-bites when compared with what remained of the gigantic figure they assailed. They sued in the County Court and

conjoined together to put a man in possession, but Jëssamer dismissed him with his claim and with a scorn so lordly that the man shrank away abashed. Jëssamer visited these presumptuous tradesfolk and rebuked them to his own great enjoyment. Did these yokel intelligences presume to imagine, he demanded, that a man, a man who had failed for two millions sterling, was to be harried by their like? He had never cared for Hetheridge the man, but he had esteemed Hetheridge the financier always. Now, in the grandeur of his fall he would, had his employer shown a proper spirit, have revered him like an emperor.

As Hetheridge's bodily strength returned, his mind cleared, and his troubles and terrors became more real to him. It was as if with every ounce of strength he gained an extra ounce of weight were posed upon his shoulders. For three months he had been free of his phantom, but now it began to visit him again and to take its old place at his shoulder. He thought with an inconceivable dread of the possibility of its reappearing before him, and he would have flown to the uttermost ends of the earth rather than face again the accusation of its gaze. He clung to life with a desperate tenacity. Whatever day of life he could secure meant a respite from an imaginary something which must necessarily be worse than what he had endured already—that ugly physical hell which is the bugbear of ignorant and ignoble souls. He had put its contemplation to the door thousands of times, but it came back now with a constant insistence and reiteration. It had always returned after expulsion, but he had been used to contemplate it from far away. Perhaps he had been able to think it had been no more than a bugbear after all, a device of the nurse to scare naughty children to propriety. In any case it had been distant. He had felt young and full of health and vigor, but now he dared doubt no longer, and the awful thing was near. He was an old and broken man, aged years before his time, poor and friendless, with no hand to guard him

from the rubs\* of the world, or to help a wretched and despairing soul to cling to an enfeebled body.

He wondered why he was not denounced to justice, and as the days rolled by, leaving him still at freedom, his terror mounted to hysteria. So soon as he could possibly gather strength enough to move about the world alone, he resolved on flight. He had an abject terror of the house he lived in, and had never once dared to re-enter the chamber in which his phantom had suddenly resolved itself into seeming flesh and blood.

A day or two before his illness a payment of some few hundred pounds had been paid to him in Bank of England notes. This was a very rare occurrence, for in his establishment, where thousands and hundreds of thousands were gambled for, the game was played by the medium of paper counters. Checks, promissory-notes, bills of exchange, securities of all sorts were plentiful; but in that very temple of mammon a bank-note was a rarity, and a coin passed in the way of business a thing unknown. He had thrust this haphazard sum into his breast pocket, and had decided to pay it into the bank together with checks and securities of far greater value, but had forgotten his intention for the day, and had carried the money home with him. It was but a small affair, and he had thought but little of it, but now he recalled it to memory with an extravagant joy. Granted that his strength came back to him, he had the means of flight. He could at least put the sea between him and his fears of arrest.

It was significant of him, and natural in him, that no thought of the girl whom he had reared to regard him as her father, entered his mind. She was forgotten as completely as if she had never existed. He had accepted the charge in one of the few touches of right he had ever experienced in his life-time, and had continued it half freakishly and half to vent a spite on a man whose manner displeased him. It is probable that she would have profited immensely if he had died

before ruin fell upon him, for he had no ambition to leave a name behind him such as has urged the founders of great charitable enterprises, and he had neither friends nor relatives among whom to divide his wealth. She would have been his natural heritrix, although only by the perpetration of a harmless fraud which had become habitual to him.

He remembered to have thrust the bank-notes into a cash-box which he had placed in an old-fashioned armoire in his bedroom. So far as he had reason to believe, it had been under lock and key ever since, and when once the double idea had occurred to him that the necessity for flight was urgent and that he had or ought to have the means of flight at hand, he was on fire with fear and impatience until he could decide that the precious paper had not been tampered with. The master of millions when he last entered the house sought now for this mere handful of money with a desperate eagerness. He was on the lawn when the memory of his treasure occurred to him. He summoned his one remaining man-servant and bade him assist him in mounting the stairs.

"Faster, you snail," he snarled, as the man paused upon the mid-way landing to give him breathing-time. He dismissed him fiercely at the bedroom door, and having secured the door with fingers that scarcely obeyed his will, he hobbled on his two sticks to the armoire, and to his intense relief found that the cash-box had not been tampered with. It came into his mind that once before in his career, he had made use of a sum of money, set carelessly aside in safety without the merest glimmer of knowledge in his own mind as to the service it would render him, and for a time he exulted.

"I shall be away," he said to himself, as he sat in an arm-chair fumbling with the notes and gloating over them. "They think I am helpless here. They fancy that I can't get away. They are making inquiries to confirm suspicion, and are taking their time

about it. I am stronger than they fancy. I have more wit than they think for. I shall baffle them yet."

If he had not had such grounded reason to fear pursuit, his dread of it would have amounted to a mania. It was in the air, he sweated at its menace in the night-time, his days were full of it, and every footfall in the quiet house, every arrival of the doctor, every innocent messenger who bore provisions to the kitchen quarters brought that threat nearer and made him tremble at it.

His attendants had been honest, and the loose coin he had carried in his pockets at the moment of seizure was still in his possession. It amounted to some six or seven pounds in gold and silver. The only personal vanity to which he had ever surrendered himself lay in the possession of jewelry, and he had rings and scarf-pins, watch-chains and jewelled pendants enough to have satisfied the desires of half a dozen average dandies. So as soon as his poor modicum of strength returned to him, he emptied all these from the various cases in which they rested and made a little glittering heap of them upon his dressing-table.

"I shall have something to live on," he muttered; "something to live on. I shan't starve for one while anyhow."

He sat down at the table to arrange the scarf-pins in rows, pinning them into a handkerchief, preparatory to packing them away, but his fingers were clumsy and tremulous, and seemed reluctant to obey his will. He succeeded at last, however, and having rolled up all the wealthy gew-gaws, he thrust them into the foot of a sock and locked them into the cash-box, which in its turn he secured in the armoire. From that hour he set himself resolutely to do whatever seemed likely to increase his strength. He followed the ordinances of the doctor with a slavish fidelity, exercised himself persistently but without over-taxing, and bent the whole remnant of his will to the one end he had in view. In his own dreadful way, he had given proof years ago



of an iron tenacity of resolve. He was enfeebled in every respect, and brain and body had alike suffered. His purpose was not of the old indomitable force, but he still made it serve. Within two months from the hour of his daughter's departure from the house, he felt that he might dare to face the world. He could far less dare to wait and face the danger which slept so quietly.

He had had his bed conveyed to one of the ground-floor rooms, and had caused the apartment to be furnished in all respects as a bedchamber. The difficulty of mounting the stairs gave an absolutely valid excuse for this manoeuvre, but he was in great anxiety lest his real purpose should be discovered. The night was cold and raw, and when he looked out upon it from his window a thin gauze of cloud, with an opalescent aqueous light within it, was hurrying, wind-driven, across the face of the half-obsured crescent of the moon. The bare poles of the trees whipped the air, and clanked against each other in the November blast. It was after ten o'clock. The house had been still for a full half hour, and not a mouse was stirring. He had attired himself in a heavily furred overcoat, had packed his valuables and change of underclothing in a small bag, and now stood ready to depart. The French windows opened close to the drive, and once outside the house there was no fear of his being missed before morning, and hardly any of pursuit even then until such time as the avenger should receive news of his flight.

The night air struck upon him with a fresh chill which braced him, and he walked stealthily toward the gate, taking care to avoid the drive, which was faintly illuminated by the rays of a distant lamp, and crossing the lawn where the shadows of the evergreens deepened the gloom of the night. The gate creaked upon its hinges as he opened it and gave his nerves a momentary jar, but nothing came of it. He walked along the street, seen now for the first time for nearly

half a year, and quite unfamiliar in the winter aspect. There had been rain that afternoon, and the puddles in the road crinkled and shivered beneath the wind and glimmered palely in the light of the street-lamps.

With a view to his enterprise, he had feigned an especial weakness on that day and had taken complete rest. The vigor which animated his limbs was surprising to himself, though the passers-by saw only a tottering old man with darkened glasses and a great gray beard, who shuffled painfully along the pavement with the aid of a walking-stick. He had laid all his plans beforehand, and was ready with a scheme to baffle pursuit when it should start upon his trail. He made his way to the nearest cab-stand, distant perhaps three hundred yards from his own gate, and hailing the driver of the sole vehicle standing there, instructed him to drive to Kew. He entered the cab with considerable difficulty and was driven away.

"Have the glass down, sir?" the driver asked him, through the little aperture at the top of the cab.

"No," he answered brusquely, in that distorted voice which had belonged to him since his first seizure, "Drive on."

The cabman touched his steed with the whip and resumed the slashing pace he had for the moment relaxed to make his question audible. The rush of cold air into the cab vivified and half intoxicated the passenger. He was coated well and had a thick silk muffler turned about his neck, and it was a physical joy to be back in open spaces. Where the road was clear of houses, the flat meadow-lands with their trees which wrestled in the embraces of the wind lay gloomy and sombre on either side, with winking rain-pools throwing a slant light for a mere instant of time beneath the moon, or in the gleam of some distant lamp. The clouds hurried in confused and obscured masses across the sky, changing in form perpetually. The splash and rattle of the horses' feet, the whirr and rumble of the wheels, the phantom trees that ran

toward him from the darkness with their battling branches and were passed and vanished in a flash, the rushing wind all seemed to speak exultantly of liberty. He hugged the precious bag upon his knees in both his fur-gloved hands, and leaning his bearded chin upon the crook of his walking-stick, he stared right and left into the night, and triumphed at every stride that brought him nearer safety.

When he had reached the end of his drive, had paid the cabman, and had seen him drive away, his mood failed him suddenly altogether. He knew but little of Holy Writ, and could have made no guess as to where the phrase might be found, or where he had heard it, yet the words came into his mind as clearly as if a voice had whispered them:—"Though I fly to the uttermost ends of the earth, Thou art there." His fear was at his shoulder again, the murdered Redwood dogged his footsteps, and the delighted frenzy of a minute back was a mockery and a delusion which left his state yet bitter and more forlorn.

He had caused himself to be set down within a little distance of the railway station, and walking thither he feigned to make inquiries about a train to Barnes. Emerging, he chartered a new cab, and was driven Londonward as far as Hammersmith, where he had a confusing choice of lines of rail which would help still further to check pursuit. He chose the District Line and booked for Charing Cross. Arrived there, he discovered that the mail started for Antwerp, *via* Dover and Ostend, shortly after seven o'clock in the morning. He took a room in the hotel which commands the station, and having forced himself to eat, drank three or four glasses of brandy-and-water, and so betook himself to bed and to sleep. In pursuance of the orders he had given, he was aroused in time to dress, breakfast, and catch the train. The platform was full of hurrying figures, and a yellow fog blurred the lights. He had taken a first-class passage, resolving to enter on a severe economy when once safely

landed on the Continent, but at the same time reckless in his expenditure of his narrow funds. He was slow in mounting the carriage steps, and was rather roughly handled by a burly and excited passenger who pressed up behind him with a portmanteau and a great bale of rugs and overcoat, determined to secure a corner seat. The whistle sounded, there was a slamming of doors, and at the very instant when the train began to move, a late traveller stepped into the carriage and took his seat opposite Hetheridge, who, for the moment, paid no heed to him. His eyes, indeed, were occupied in searching the platform for an altogether problematical pursuer, and when he turned his gaze within the carriage, the train was already in motion, the light was flickering, and the filthy yellow oil washing to and fro in its glass basin. So that he had no opportunity of recognizing his *vis-à-vis*. He had purchased a rug at the bookstall of the station, and wrapping this about him he leaned back in his seat, folded his hands, and closed his eyes in the hope of passing an hour or two in slumber. His night's rest, despite his potations, had been broken and of almost no value to him, and he began to feel that if he were to continue his journey without incurring a relapse, he must husband all his resources. For a while his thoughts dragged at him, haling him hither and thither, but at last his fatigue told. The rumble, rumble, of the wheels began to sink and rise upon his ear with a measured music and he fell into a doze.

The clear early dawn was bright when he awoke, and looking up he saw his phantom in the flesh again, gazing straight through him as if with eyes that saw within him and beyond him.

George Redwood had fulfilled his commission in London, and was travelling back to his employment at Liège.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

THE train stopped at Dover Town and the collectors bustled from carriage to carriage. A stentor on the platform bellowed "All tickets ready, please," and a smart official presented himself with a smiling tiptoe alacrity at the door of the carriage.

"Tickets, gentlemen, if you please." The carriage had four occupants. Three tickets were immediately tendered, but the bearded man with the blue glasses made no motion or sign of motion. "Ticket, if you please, sir," said the official, tapping him on the shoulder. "Quick, sir, if you please, the train's five minutes behind time already."

Hetheridge looked up mechanically, as the hand touched his shoulder, but made no further motion.

"Come, come, sir," cried the collector. "You're keeping the train waiting." The guard sounded a warning whistle and the train began to move on again. The collector entered the carriage, closed the door behind him, and took his seat with a little air of impatience and injury.

"Now will you let me have that ticket, if you please, sir?" Hetheridge began to fumble painfully with his rug, then with the button of his overcoat. Finally he found the ticket just as the train was slackening its pace at the pier. The collector looked at it with suspicion, punched it carefully, and sprang from the carriage before the train had well come to a standstill. The two passengers nearest to the door dashed out hurriedly, and Redwood was in the act of following, when he looked back and saw the bearded man sitting helpless behind his blue goggles, evincing no disposition to move. George had seen the ticket in

the collector's hands, and knew that this helpless fellow-passenger was bound for Antwerp. It seemed unmanly to leave the poor old fellow there, but time was pressing.

"You are going to Antwerp," he said, taking him by the arm, and in his hurry somewhat roughly assisting him to rise. "You must come with me." He snatched up the old man's rug and threw it over his own arm, seized a little black bag which lay upon the seat, thrust a thick walking-stick into the trembling hand and half led, half drew him to the platform. Porters were rushing to and fro, passengers thronged on the boat, the gangways and the pier, a hoarse humming from the engine pipes set the funnels of the steamer ringing, and filled the air with a deep murmur. There was a boisterous wind and the sea was washing against the wall of the pier with a promise of heavy weather outside, but the wintry morning sky was resplendent, and the sun flamed like some imaginable jewel.

Guiding and supporting his companion's tottering steps, George passed down the gangway and along the deck, surrendered the rug and the small black hand-bag to the owner, and then sought a place in which to bestow himself and his personal impedimenta. The warning whistle shrieked, the gangway was withdrawn, the paddles made their first revolution, and the boat heaved freely to the motion of the water. Redwood had found a place for his rugs and travelling-bag, and had started on a brisk promenade up and down the deck, when he saw the late protégé clinging to the deck railing with his belongings about his feet, and staring in his direction in a manner which looked altogether fatuous and absurd. He called a steward.

"Just look after that old gentleman," he said, indicating Hetheridge. "He seems to be altogether helpless and bewildered."

"I'll see to him, sir," the man responded, and at once crossed over. He helped Hetheridge to a seat, having first tucked him tightly about his waist, gave him his

black bag and his walking-stick, and having surveyed him inquiringly with his head one side, as if asking where a finishing touch could be put in with advantage, decided suddenly that the work was complete, and departed abruptly.

Redwood tramped up and down the deck, setting his blood in brisk circulation and filling his lungs with the revivifying salt sea air. Every now and then he cast a glance at the queer old bearded figure in the blue goggles, and by and by he began to be uncomfortably aware of the fact that the man's eyes were fixed upon him, and that they followed him as if with intent watchfulness in his march to and fro. At every turn he made at the extremity of his brief promenade he found the face turned toward him. As he moved, this apparently unreasoning watcher's head turned as if upon a pivot, and when next Redwood faced him, he met the stare of the blue goggles full in his face. Redwood was profoundly unhappy, but he was young, and was not yet beyond a smile for anything which looked ludicrous or comical. The bunched-up old figure was almost farcical in aspect, and more than once when his back was turned upon him, Redwood's features creased into a smile.

The time went on, and the stranger's ceaseless inspection grew embarrassing. When he had endured it for a full hour, Redwood drew up brusquely before him and returned his look. The man's eyes, dimly seen behind the darkening glass, met his, unwinking and unwavering, but the shaky hands were clasped together, and the figure sank back as if in fear of him.

Redwood resumed his promenade, hopeful that the wordless hint he had given would be accepted, but the unrelaxing watch continued as before.

He marched for a further quarter of an hour in a growing irritation, and pausing a second time before his watcher, accosted him.

"Have you any doubt," he asked, "as to my identity?"

The man crouched before him in an obvious terror. His face, pale enough already, grew paler still; his lips fumbled for a word, and his features twitched spasmodically. Redwood stared at him in astonishment, not unmixed with that kind of shrinking fear which some people always experience in the contemplation of an intellect unbalanced.

"I know you," said the man at last, in a horror-stricken moan; "I know you."

Redwood had been on the edge of moving away when these words were spoken.

"Are you sure of that?" he asked, with a touch of pity and repugnance. He had quite made up his mind by this time that the man's mind was deranged. His whole aspect and manner favored that conclusion.

"Suré," groaned Hetheridge, in a voice of such mortal agony that Redwood quivered without knowing why; "yes, I am sure."

"Tell me who I am," said Redwood, not unkindly.

A quivering spasm passed over Hetheridge's face, and again his lips fumbled for an answer.

"Tell me who I am," Redwood repeated, slowly and distinctly, in the tone one uses to a foreigner or a child, when seeking to convey something not easily understood. To his intense amazement, the twitching lips pronounced his name in a husky moan only just audible.

"George Redwood."

The boat was rolling and plunging, and to be sure of his foot-hold whilst standing still, George was compelled to lean forward and clutch the rail by Hetheridge's shoulder, so that the husky voice breathed almost in his ear. He gazed at the man with keen inquiry, but expression is hard to read, and to Hetheridge's guilty and preoccupied thought the glance carried a stern and unrelenting accusation.

"Where did you see me last?" he asked. He was bending forward so that the two faces almost met.

"I saw you last at Richmond," Hetheridge an-



swered. "For God's sake, George, have mercy. It's a long time ago now. It's quite a long time ago."

Here for the first time suspicion of the truth, or rather suspicion of a mere fraction of the truth shot into Redwood's mind. He knew now the nature of disguise his father's murderer had assumed at Upnor years ago. The paralytic gait, the beard, the tinted glasses. He knew, too, that his mother had recognized Hetheridge by the resemblance to the disguised figure into which he had fallen by reason of his long illness.

"Tell me your name," he said, between his teeth.

"John Hetheridge," the stricken wretch responded.

To have the unspeakable villain there, under his hand, to have the power to yield him to justice, to have vengeance for his father's death and payment for the miseries for his own torn heart within his grasp, and yet to know that he was bound in sacred honor to do nothing, bred such a tumult in his soul as was well-nigh unendurable. Whether the madman who mistook the living son for the dead father's wraith or the son himself with all his wrongs and hatred thronging on him suffered the more, it would be hard to say.

Redwood felt that if he lingered near the monster the mere physical temptation which beset him to seize him by the throat and to shake out the miserable remnant of his life, would grow too strong to be resisted. He turned away, and staggered across the rolling deck, staring blindly at the billows as they rolled up to meet the cleaving bows. Inaction was not to be endured. He began to pace up and down again on the wet and slippery deck. The roaring wind and driving spray had sent everybody but himself and Hetheridge to shelter. Hetheridge sat helpless and Redwood ploughed and stumbled to and fro with his whole mind in a ferment of love, and agony, and revenge. But there was nothing to be done, he was bound to contain himself and to keep silence.

As he mastered his emotions his thoughts grew

clearer and another part of the truth became manifest to him. It was evident that Hetheridge's mind was quite unhinged in one particular, and that he took George Redwood for his father. George was fully aware of the surprising likeness he presented. Sir Eustace had emphasized it quite recently, and he himself had arrived at the fact that Hetheridge's perturbed fancy had momentarily mistaken his solid presence for his father's apparition. He saw that that delusion had now taken fixed possession of the murderer's mind. The boat reached Ostend, and during the delay there for luncheon, and the examination of baggage at the Douane, Redwood paced the platform without cessation, whilst Hetheridge, from a seat in front of the refreshment-room, watched his every motion as if fascinated. He was under a compulsion to follow his victim's movements, to notice every gesture, and to strive to read every expression of his face. Vaguely he asked himself in his beclouded mind if his victim had died in mortal sin that he lived now in such iniquitude. Were they companions for eternity?

When at last the train started, Hetheridge, still under the same resistless compulsion, followed Redwood into the carriage he had chosen; the young man had thrown himself into a seat and stared gloomily out of the further window with his back turned toward the carriage door. He kept that attitude for a long time, and it was not until they were miles upon their journey that he turned and saw his enemy still near him. All the venom of his nature stirred at the sight of him, and to breathe the same air was a torture. At the first stopping-place he dashed from the carriage and entered another compartment. Hetheridge's nearness still tormented him, but less exigently than before. It occurred to him suddenly that he had seen the ticket for Antwerp at Dover town station, and that by some oversight on the part of the officials, Hetheridge had been allowed to take the wrong train. Once more his guess hit very near the truth, and he surmised that

his presence had a sort of fascination which the other found it difficult, if not impossible, to resist.

The train mid-way was enfiladed by the guard, who, climbing along the *marchepied*, entered each carriage in turn with his brisk and civil "*Vos billets, ei'l vous plait, messieurs!*" In due turn he alighted upon Hetheridge, who produced a ticket for Antwerp.

"*M'sien a fait erreur,*" said the guard. "*Il se trouve dans la train pour Bruxelles et pas pour Anvers.*"

"*Alors,*" replied Hetheridge. "*Il faut que vous payez la difference, et mon perd de temps aussi. Je ne suis pas chargé d'inspecter de billets, moi.*"

He was only mad—"Nor'-nor'-West." Where money was concerned he could still tell a hawk from a hemshaw. The guard saw the matter in a somewhat different light, and smilingly compromised by a promise of a free return to Antwerp. As a mere matter of fact, Antwerp and Brussels were one to the fugitive. If he were discovered to have taken a ticket for Antwerp, he could naturally be sought in that city, and then all trace of him would be lost for the moment. In the presence of his ghost these things mattered a little, and in the Station du Nord, of the Belgium capital, the ghost was back again.

Redwood had been revolving certain things in his mind, and had decided to bottom the mystery, which for so many years had been unfathomable. He recognized his own power over Hetheridge, and determined to put it to employment.

When he appeared on the platform, he saw at once that the fascination he excited had undergone no abatement. Hetheridge's eyes still held him, and his tottering footsteps followed him. He expressed his desire to break the journey and to stay in Brussels for the night, and having seen to the unloading of his baggage, he turned on Hetheridge.

"Come with me."

He was obeyed as by a man in a mesmeric trance. He saw the wreck into a *fiacre* and gave the driver

orders to follow his own vehicle to the Hotel de Suede, in the Rue de L'Eveque. Arrived there, he asked for a private room, and after a trifling delay was conducted into an upstairs parlor.

"Does monsieur desire anything at present?" asked the smart chambermaid.

"I will give my orders later on," George answered, and the girl retired. "Sit there," he commanded Hetheridge, pointing to a chair, "and answer the questions I shall put to you."

Being obeyed, he fell to pacing to and fro, thinking how best to open his inquiry. There was a revulsion in his heart against the means he used, but the case was extraordinary and not to be dealt with by common methods.

"Listen to me," he said, pausing suddenly. "It is part of the punishment ordained to you that you shall tell me everything. What motive had you for that cruel murder?"

Hetheridge tried in vain to answer, but finally stammered out a few disconnected and unmeaning words.

"Tell me the motive of your crime," Redwood repeated sternly.

Hetheridge, trembling with superstitious horror, unfolded all his story. Redwood dragged it from him, scrap by scrap, remorselessly, until at length the truth stood revealed in nakedness.

"I am quite broken," Hetheridge resumed at the finish, "quite broken. I ought to be a young man still, and look at me. You might have mercy on me now; for God's sake, don't haunt me any longer. Have pity. Let me die in peace, I shan't be long, I can't be long."

"If it were not for one thing," Redwood responded, sternly, "I would have you hanged like a dog. If I could surrender you to the fate you want without soiling your daughter's name, I would drag you back to England and force you to confession."

"No, no, no," screamed Hetheridge. "Give me time. Let me have a little time. I must have time to repent. I must have time to make my peace with Heaven."

"You go scot-free," said Redwood. Using unconsciously the phrase which Hetheridge had found delightful years ago, and in which had lived so bitter an irony in all his latter time. "Your child's name shall not be despised by any public rumor of your crime. You are free. Go; carry your own punishment with you to the grave. If you can repent, repent, but let me see you no more."

He cast the door wide open and pointed to it with a commanding hand. The abject misery arose, still clutching by instinct the precious hand-bag in which all his worldly belongings lay. He crawled feebly to the door, and down the staircase, pausing twice to look back. He disappeared at the turning of the stairs, and Redwood, falling on a sofa, hid his face in both hands.

It cost him an hour or two to recover from the agitation into which this singular interview had thrown him. A bath in stinging cold water, and complete change of raiment seemed necessary to purify him from the taint the mere physical nearness of his father's murderer had brought him. He had not broken his fast since leaving London, and even now the food he tried to swallow seemed to choke him; but he managed to eat a little, and having finished his pint of wine, he put on his hat and gloves and overcoat, and walked into the streets. The winter night had fallen, but the streets were ablaze with light and brisk with many passers to and fro. He had walked but a minute or two, when a loud and excited voice arrested him. He looked up, and found himself in the immediate neighborhood of the General Post Office, and there, with a curious crowd about him, was a burly Englishman, vociferating in voluble but absolutely incomprehensible phrases—French interlarded with English.

Redwood recognized the voice and the burly shoulders as belonging to Sir Eustace Wyncomb. He dashed across the road, and found the baronet engaged in wild colloquy with a gendarme, whom he held firmly by both shoulders, and who gaped and stared at him without understanding so much as a single word.

"Sir Eustace!" cried Redwood. "What is the matter? Can I be of service to you?"

"Great heaven, Redwood!" cried the baronet; "that you should arrive at such a moment passes everything. I have just seen your father's murderer, the villain who called himself André Dom. I knew him in a second; he was just starting to drive away in a cab. I dashed at him, but he cried out to the driver. I hung on for a minute, but I had a nasty fall at last. I should have known him anywhere amongst a million. I could swear to him. I collared this fellow, the first policeman I could come across, but I can't make him understand."

He was wild with excitement, and now that he had time to observe him, Redwood saw that he was mud from head to foot, and that one ungloved hand was bleeding.

"Where are you staying, Sir Eustace?" he demanded.

"At the Belle Vue Hotel," the baronet answered.

"Let me call you a cab," said Redwood. "I will call upon you in an hour. Better! I will go with you and you shall give me a full description of the man. I will write it out in French, and have it transmitted from the police station here by wire to every port and railway station. You are sure of the man?"

"Sure?" echoed Sir Eustace. "As sure as I am of my own existence. I tell you I'd swear to him among a million."

The crowd stood round, wondering and jeering. George called a carriage, and the two were driven away.

"Now tell me what the man was like."

Sir Eustace described Hetheridge to the life—bent, paralytic, bearded, the eyes defended by goggle glasses.

"He spoke in French," he cried, "and I could swear to his voice as well as to his looks. He knew me, too, the villain. If I had found him in a Christian country I'd have had him by the heels in jail by now."

"There has been a great lapse of time," George urged, desperately. "In a matter of such consequence there must be no mistake."

"Man alive!" cried Sir Eustace, with impatience. "There *can* be no mistake. I tell you the scoundrel knew me. He got back into the corner of the carriage the second I went for him. I heard him speak my name under his breath, and then he shrieked out like a parrot in his own jargon, and the fool of a cabman drove on without understanding what I said to him. I tried to open the door to get in, but I'm not so young as I used to be, and it caused me a nasty tumble. I was within an ace of being run over."

The cab was arrested at the entrance of Sir Eustace's hotel, and George assisted him to alight.

"You have nothing more to tell me before I go?"

"Nothing more, except that the blackguard was well dressed. He wore a sealskin coat the like of which I should think it a sinful extravagance to buy. Now, don't lose a minute, lad, and if you want for money come to me. I'd spend a thousand pounds willingly to run that fellow down."

"I will be with you in an hour," George answered, "and in the mean time I will communicate with the police. Drive me," he called to the driver as he entered the vehicle, "to the Central Station of Police."

"Do you know the lingo?" the baronet bawled to him as the driver touched his horse.

"Yes, yes," he answered, "wait for me here, Sir Eustace."

Ten minutes later he was face to face with the officer in charge of the Central Station.

"Is there a detective officer in Brussels," he asked, "who will undertake private business?"

The official answered that there were several.

"Can you recommend me to a discreet and capable man in whom I can repose confidence? He may rely on being well paid."

The officer wrote out an address, George read it, thanked him for his courtesy and drove away again ready to spend wit and effort, time and money, to save from justice the one man in the whole world whom he had cause to hate.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

"You are Monsieur Buls?"

"At your service, sir."

"I wish to discover the whereabouts of a person who arrived in Brussels to-day from Ostend."

"The person is still in Brussels?"

"To the best of my belief. I am recommended to you by the officer in charge of the Central Police Station. I shall have to rely entirely upon your silence and discretion."

"They are a part of my stock in trade, monsieur."

Redwood drew a hundred-franc note from his pocket-book and laid it in the detective's hand.

"That will do to begin with?"

"Amplly," said Monsieur Buls, slipping the note into his waistcoat pocket. He was a little swarthy man, keen as a terrier to look at, and singularly alert and business-like in manner. "Monsieur will have the obligingness to give me what particulars he can."

Redwood described Hetheridge minutely, and the detective listened, nodding here and there to signify attention.

"The gentleman is sufficiently marked," he said. "There should be little difficulty in discovering him."

He undertook to set to work at once, and as he talked he began to put on an overcoat.

"I should like," said Redwood, "to know your news at the earliest possible moment, and if I shall not be in your way, I should prefer to accompany you."

Monsieur Buls offered no objection to this, and they set out together to the railway station. Then the detective encountered an ally in a member of the regular force. This man had noticed Hetheridge, and

had seen him enter a restaurant immediately outside the building. The inquirers crossed the road, and the detective questioned the restaurateur. Yes, a gentleman answering the description given had entered shortly after the arrival of the mail train. He had asked for a *carafe* of cognac, and had consumed a considerable quantity—five *petits verres*.

"And could you tell me in what direction he went?" asked the detective.

"As it happened," said the restaurateur, who was a large and florid man, with a declamatory manner, he could do more than indicate the direction. His widowed sister had recently established a hotel in the suburbs. The gentleman after whom inquiry was being made had appealed to him for the quiet address of a retired and quiet hotel. He had naturally recommended his sister, and there was *sa carte*:

*Madame Neibart, Hotel Toisoïn d'or, Rue d'Artevelde.*

"That, I suppose," said George, as he and the detective emerged together from the restaurant, "that I suppose puts an end to the inquiry?"

"H'm," said the detective, smiling and shrugging his shoulders; "that depends. Has the gentleman any reason to suppose that he is being followed?"

"He may have," George responded.

"And will he be willing to be discovered?"

"Decidedly unwilling," George responded.

"In that case," returned Monsieur Buls, "it is very likely that our chase has only just begun."

In effect it proved so. No person at all answering to Hetheridge's description had presented himself at the *Toisoïn d'or* that day. Whether the fugitive had simply changed his mind, or had deliberately adopted the device with a view of obscuring his trail, could only be surmised. The detective inclined to the latter supposition, and George, who knew nothing of Hetheridge's urgent fear of pursuit, leaned to the former.

In any case, the pursuit had now to be started on

novel lines and conducted on an organized plan. Monsieur Buls, honorably retired from the executive, was on excellent terms with his old colleagues and was afforded many facilities in the conduct of his craft. A description of Hetheridge was circulated by means of the police wires, from point to point of the city, and this having been done the detective set out to the spot Sir Eustace had indicated to George as the scene of his encounter with the murderer. After a good deal of inquiry, one shopman in the neighborhood was found who had witnessed the fracas and who knew by sight the driver of the vehicle which Hetheridge had engaged. The new trail thus discovered, was followed with ardor. It was followed in vain for three hours and at the end of that time resulted in a momentary but decisive check. The driver was speechlessly intoxicated, and no information of any sort could possibly be extracted from him before morning.

George had perforce to return to his hotel, whence he dispatched a note to Sir Eustace telling him the inquiry was in progress, and that news would probably reach them on the morrow. There was little sleep for him that night, but whilst he sat at breakfast next morning Monsieur Buls entered, smiling and elate.

"We have our man," he announced. "He is stopping at the Hotel Continental. He has given the name of Walhaert and he professes to be a negociant from Cannes."

"I don't see how he can carry out that disguise," said George, "for he is an Englishman, and I have never known that he had any knowledge of French."

The detective's countenance fell a little.

"He is reported to me as a Frenchman," he responded, "and as having the accent of the Midi."

"I am afraid we're on the wrong scent," said Redwood. "We must try again."

"You had better at least see the man," the detective urged. "In every other particular he answers absolutely."

George rose at once from the table, and left his scarcely tasted meal. In two or three minutes he and the detective stood outside the door of Hetheridge's bedroom. After a whispered consultation, he knocked, and a voice he knew, cried, "*Entrez!*" He obeyed, and with a motion to his companion to await him in the corridor, he closed the door behind him. Hetheridge looked up at his entrance, bleary-eyed and tremulous. He had discarded his glasses for the time being, and sat with a cup of coffee on his knees and a small roll on the table before him.

"You're back again?" he quavered.

"Yes," said George. "I am back again, and I am here with a purpose. You must be prepared instantly to come with me. You must be ready at any moment when I shall call upon you. Your life is in danger and for your child's sake, you must escape pursuit. Sir Eustace Wyncomb saw and recognized you last night. Your description is already in the hands of the police, but nobody will suspect you to be in my charge. You will be safe with me. Stay here on your peril until I return for you."

Every word of this he delivered in a swift and impressive whisper, and at the close of it with a swiftly formed resolve, he left the room and rejoined the detective.

"You're right, Monsieur Buls," he said. "That is the man who reached Brussels yesterday, but it is not the man I want. The mistake was mine, not yours. My informant was misled by one or two points of striking similarity between this stranger and the man I am in search of. May I request your acceptance of this further sum of a hundred francs, and may I offer my apologies for having employed you in a wild-goose chase?"

The secret agent took the money, made his adieux, raised his hat, and was gone; eminently satisfied with the result of his labors. He had no reason in the world for doubting Redwood's bona fides, and dismissed

- the case from his mind until circumstances recalled it as the strangest surprise he had experienced in the course of his professional career.

Redwood felt keenly that it was an essential thing for him to appear to be deeply interested in the chase. He could not as yet make up his mind as to the best means of securing Hetheridge from pursuit, but he was fairly certain that nobody could possibly suspect him of sheltering the man accused of the murder of his father. The best plan seemed to be to take the broken and helpless villain actually under his own charge, and if need were, to keep him hidden in his own rooms. He thought of the chambers he had taken at Liège, and discussed within himself the possibility of sheltering Hetheridge there. At first the idea looked monstrous, but when he came to question it more narrowly he discovered that it had no real drawback apart from his own intense repugnance to it. Entire affection disdains nice hands, and in such a cause he dared not wait to think about his own pains. The one thing to be done was to save Ellice. At any cost and at all costs he was determined upon that. He had more than half decided in the course of his brief homeward walk, and on his return to the hotel he found a message there which precipitated his resolution in an instant.

"My dear Redwood," wrote Sir Eustace. "I am just off to breakfast at the Embassy. The Ambassador here is an old college chum of mine. I wrote him last night informing him of the facts of the case. We talked the matter over this morning, and decided on what is best to be done. He has already promised to put the whole weight of the Embassy behind us, and you may rely on my word when I tell you that the entire police force of Belgium will be practically at our disposal until the villain I saw so providentially yesterday is arrested. Call on me at the Belle Vue at twelve, and let me know what you have done in the mean time."

This note made the circumstances of the case look desperate. To be successful he must make a move at once. Redwood dispatched a telegraphic message to Sir Eustace at the Embassy. "On the track. Shall probably have news for you this afternoon." He signed this and sent it away by one of the hotel servants, and hurried back into the hotel in which he had left Hetheridge.

The more it seemed necessary to be near the man, and to shield him from discovery, the more his loathing grew, and by this time it was as much as George could do to force himself into that hated presence. He burst into the room with no preliminary announcement of himself, and found the tremulous wreck still seated at the table, nursing his empty coffee-cup, and the untasted roll before him.

"Come with me at once," he said.

Hetheridge obeyed him blindly. He would have gone anywhere, would have done anything at the commandment of that apparition. He guessed dimly in his own bewildered mind, that he was being held in reserve for some fate more awful than he could imagine, but he was beyond all power of resistance, and had not even enough of will left to inspire him with a wish to combat the power which dominated him. George helped him with his furred overcoat, and shuddered with repulsion at the mere contact of his raiment. Such a rage and hatred filled his heart that he was half tempted to take the law into his own hands and slay the man fate forced him to protect. Hetheridge took his hat, his stick, his little black bag and his gloves, and they walked along the corridor, down the broad stairs, and into the street together. Redwood hailed a fly and they were driven to the Station Leopold. He found that a train for Liège started in a few minutes. He had not been quite certain of the hour of departure and had feared that he was late. On reflection, he decided to book for Namur, to leave his charge there and to return with the pretence that he had been

led away on a false scent. He was no pretender by nature and had a native abhorrence for a lie, but if the man were to be saved at all, half measures were useless. Once more, entire affection disdains clean hands. He was there to save Ellice and not to spare himself from anything. The tumult of love and pity, and loathing and vengeance which filled his mind upon that journey, refuses to be painted.

In spite of all, he laid his plans quite coolly. The only safe method he could think of was to restore Hetheridge to his former aspect, and on their arrival, he put his plan into action.

"Obey my orders," he had said, sternly enough on the way down. The two were alone in the carriage, and he was without fear of being overheard. "As you value your life and safety, you will speak no word of anything but English. You understand that?"

Hetheridge blinked and nodded at him in assent.

"I shall speak for you. You will if necessary confirm anything I may say, but you will not speak at all unless I question you."

Again Hetheridge blinked and nodded, and on the understanding thus arrived at, George led him to a hairdresser's in the main street of the town and there had the tell-tale beard and mustache removed. Under the razor, John Hetheridge came back again, recognizable but strongly distorted and deeply lined. The iron mouth which had once expressed so firm a tenacity of purpose, had fallen to a flaccid weakness. The lower lip hung flabby and nervously and the upper lip was drawn a little from the teeth with a look of querulous complaint and protest. A deep wrinkle on either cheek ran from nostril to chin and set the vacuous mouth in doleful parentheses. Redwood, seeing him thus metamorphosed, realized, for the first time, what manner of man he had become, and in some slight measure at first, though later on increasingly his rage abated. His detestation of the man remained, but the physical and mental degeneration indicated in the

face inspired something which was almost pity. It was not difficult to guess what fears, what dry remorse, and what shocks of mental agony had thus bowed and broken a nature originally strong.

"To have hanged this man," said Redwood to himself, "to have discovered his crime and have hanged him out of hand, would have been an unmerited mercy."

It seemed, indeed, as if the Providence of God had been a thousandfold sterner than human justice.

Scot-free? There is no crime that goes scot-free, and here at least was one man who had paid his debt to outraged humanity in full.

Hetheridge had so long escaped identification that now that he was returned to his common aspect there was no fear of his being suspected by Sir Eustace, but Redwood thought it was best to be rid of the fur coat, which had been one of the baronet's marks of identification. It was a garment which would have made any man noticeable from its sumptuousness, and might have cost anything, from a hundred and fifty to two hundred pounds. To have made away with it without special precaution, or to have left it behind in a hotel or railway carriage, would have been to invite inquiry and possible suspicion, and Redwood decided that the best thing to do was to purchase a trunk and to lock the coat up in it and keep it in his own charge. He acted on this decision, and supplied Hetheridge with a heavy ready-made Ulster. He took away his goggles, and bought a leather eye-shade in their place, and with his man thus altered in appearance, went boldly back to Brussels with him in the afternoon.

Hetheridge still ran one risk, but for that Redwood cared less than nothing by comparison. He was liable to arrest for having left England before he had received his quittance from the Bankruptcy Court, and from that fate his protector was not careful to shelter him. He returned to the Hotel de Suede, taking Hetheridge with him and entering him in the books by



his name, without disguise—John Hetheridge, financier, London.

This done, he went immediately to see Sir Eustace Wyncomb, who was full of excitement about the action taken by the Embassy and the extraordinary swiftness and dexterity displayed by the police.

"We shall have him," cried Sir Eustace, rising from his chair as George entered the apartment, and advancing eagerly to shake hands; "we shall have him to a certainty. I had a message only half an hour ago. The villain left the hotel this morning in company with a young Englishman, and they have found out already that the pair booked to Namur. I took down a description of the rascal's companion, and that may be useful to us. He is about six feet in height, fresh-complexioned, dark hair, brown eyes, gentlemanly demeanor, speaks French fluently, but with a marked English accent. Of course, he has nothing to do with the crime, but his presence may help identification; or if the police can find him alone they'll be able to get some information out of him. And what have you been doing?"

"I?" said George, with a fast-beating heart. "I have been away on a false trail."

He trembled to think how narrowly he had escaped. Had the British Embassy employed its influence an hour earlier he might have been intercepted, and that public obloquy, from which he so passionately desired to shield Ellice, must necessarily have fallen upon her. Fortunately for him, Sir Eustace—never a man very keen to discern the expression of another—was so occupied with his own excited thoughts as to take no notice of his manner.

"I have missed my purpose," said George, turning away in some confusion, and unconsciously busying himself in arranging a number of trifles on the mantelpiece, "but I have made a strange discovery. Mr. Hetheridge is in Brussels."

It cost him an effort of courage to take the bull by

the horns in this way, but he knew the bold game to be the best.

"Hetheridge!" cried Sir Eustace. "Why, what is he doing here, in the name of wonder? How did he get here? My last news of him was that he was paralyzed and bed-ridden."

"You must have heard an exaggerated account of his condition," George answered. "In any case, he is in Brussels at this moment, and is staying at the same hotel as myself."

"Bolted from his creditors, I suppose," Sir Eustace interjected bluntly. "Well, poor fellow, I'm sorry for him. Weybridge, who knows a good deal about business, tells me that if he had never had that paralytic stroke, he stood to double his fortune by the transactions of a single year. Everybody's sorry for him and if he's making a bolt of it, he's running himself into danger. It makes it look as if he couldn't stand examination. Staying at the Suede, you say? I must go over and have a talk to him. I shall advise him by all means to go back again."

"I am afraid you won't find him very amenable to reason," George answered, finding himself by this time in full possession of his wits again. "His mind is shattered."

"In that case," returned Sir Eustace, "nobody will hurt him, but all the same, it was a misguided thing to run away. Is he fit to see anybody?"

"Perhaps," George answered, "I had better prepare him for your visit, if you mean to call upon him."

"All right," said Sir Eustace, "do so, and I'll walk over in half an hour's time."

On this understanding Redwood left him, but when Sir Eustace fulfilled his promise and presented himself at the Hotel de Suede, he found Hetheridge, for the time being, at least, in a condition in which it was impossible to question or advise him. He was stretched supine upon a couch, and at the instance of the baronet's entry, a doctor was leaning over him, watch in

hand, counting the pulsations at his wrist. George stood gravely by and motioned the new arrival to silence. They waited until the doctor had completed his examination and had given his orders, and then slipped out of the room quietly together.

"He won't last long by the look of him," said Sir Eustace, as they reached the hall.

A man standing there raised his hat in salute.

"One word, Sir Eustace."

The baronet moved on one side and bent his head to listen. George walked to the steps of the hotel, and stood looking on the narrow street. The man who had accosted the baronet was an English-speaking detective who had been specially told off by the Commissioners of Police to communicate the details of the progress of the search.

"Do you know," he asked, "who was the young gentleman who walked with you just now down the stairs?"

"That," returned Sir Eustace, imitating the detective's whisper, "is Mr. George Redwood, the son of the murdered man."

"*Sacre nous*," said the detective, falling back a step, "Impossible! That is the man who helped the suspected Walhaert to Namur."

"My good sir," cried the baronet, bluffly, "you're a fool"

"That is quite possible, Sir Eustace," the detective answered, with a sourish smile. "It has not been generally thought so, and I can prove my statement."

"Oh," cried Sir Eustace, "this is simply madness."

"Will you be at your hotel in half an hour?" the detective asked. Sir Eustace nodded. "Will you undertake that that young gentleman shall be there also?" Sir Eustace nodded again. "Very good, I will have my witnesses ready in that time, and I will prove my case."

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

SIR EUSTACE walked angrily as far as the swinging doors of the hotel and there paused in a sudden perplexity. The news was of course quite incredible, and he assured himself that he had not the faintest belief in it. It disquieted him all the same.

"I'll be hanged," he said, half aloud, "if I know whether I'm on my head or my heel." He turned to the detective who stood hat in hand a little to the rear waiting to follow him to the house. "In half an hour," he said. "Very well, we'll explore your mare's nest."

The man bowed, and Sir Eustace shouldering his way through the folding doors, laid a hand on Redwood's arm.

"Come with me," he said. "I want you at my hotel. These fellows—these detectives—have got hold of the maddest thing I ever heard of. I want you to disprove it."

"What is it?" Redwood asked in a voice not under perfect control.

"I won't tell you yet," the baronet answered with an odd sidelong look at him. "Somebody's mad. That's all I know about it."

George tried to feign curiosity, but succeeded extremely ill. Sir Eustace looked at him often in the course of their walk with an expression altogether enigmatical. He resigned the puzzle at last with a sigh of impatient bewilderment, and they completed their journey in silence. Arrived in his own apartments, the elder man lit a cigar and sat speechless for perhaps five minutes.

"Confound this tobacco," he cried at last. "There's

nothing decent or comfortable to be got outside England. I've been taking my sister down to Nice. I got no tobacco worth smoking all the way through France. I came back through Genoa and Basle, and neither in Italy nor in Switzerland could I get a tolerable cigar for love or money. Here I am in Belgium, and I'm as badly off as ever. Hang the Continent! Give me England."

Redwood, who had his own thoughts to occupy him and who was suspicious of the news which had so evidently disturbed Sir Eustace, answered absently.

"I thought the Belgium cigars pretty fair."

"Oh you," cried the baronet testily. "You are young. No man has a palate for tobacco until he's thirty."

Redwood roused himself a little, and the discussion of this not too profound theory lasted them for a little while. It languished into silence, and Sir Eustace began to walk in an irritated manner up and down the room.

"You'd think," he said, throwing his cigar spitefully into the fireplace, "that the business of a detective officer wouldn't be naturally inviting to a born idiot. You'd think a fellow would want a little sense for a trade like that. And you'd think that when the English Embassy expresses a wish that I should have a specially smart man placed at my disposal, that I shouldn't be pestered with a fool. And, upon my soul, they've sent me the crowned king of asses."

Redwood guessed the worst. He had feared it almost immediately, but now he could scarcely doubt.

The half-hour crawled by with intolerable slowness, but it came to an end at last, and punctual to the minute came the detective. His presence was announced by one of the waiters, and Sir Eustace gave orders for his admission. He came in followed by three men, two of whom Redwood recognized at once. The third wore the uniform of a railway official, and him he could not remember to have seen. They all three

surveyed him with looks of recognition, and then exchanged meaning glances among themselves.

"You speak no English," said the detective, addressing Monsieur Buls.

"A leetle," Monsieur Buls responded. "Fery leetle."

"Very well, I will translate for you. You know this gentleman?" indicating Redwood, who had risen at their entrance and now stood grasping the back of a chair with both hands, the knuckles white with unconscious effort, his face pale and his breast heaving.

"I know him," Buls responded. "He is the gentleman who employed me privately to trace a person who arrived by yesterday's train from Ostend."

"You found that person for him?"

"Yes. I found him at the Continental Hotel. He was staying there in a room number sixty-eight. I conducted the gentleman to the door. He had a brief interview with the occupant of the chamber, and came out saying he was not the man he looked for."

"Don't trouble to translate," cried Sir Eustace, "I understand so far." Redwood and he exchanged a glance, which on the one side was at once defiant and appealing, and on the other charged with pure bewilderment.

"You do speak English," said the detective, addressing the second man. "Tell your story."

"I am concierge of the Continental Hotel," the man began. "Yesterday, in the evening, a gentleman came who gave the name of Walhaert. He described himself as of Cannes in the south of France, a negotiant—what do you say?—shop-keeper. He was a gray man. He wore a big beard and mustache and glasses of blue. He stooped and was paralytic. We gave him room number sixty-eight. This morning Monsieur Buls and this gentleman," indicating Redwood, "called to see him, and left almost immediately. A little later this gentleman came back, and he and the old man went away together. This afternoon, when in-

quiries were made by the police, this gentleman was passing down the street. I pointed him out as the man who had accompanied Monsieur Walhaert from the hotel."

"Redwood," said Sir Eustace, in a cracked and strident voice, "are these men mad? Or are you; or am I? Or are we all in a crazy dream together?"

Redwood answered not a word, but stood erect and pale, with his hands still grasping the rail of the chair before him.

"You speak no English," said the detective, addressing the third and last of his contingent, "but tell your story, you will be understood."

"I am a ticket-taker at the South station. This morning this gentleman, with a man answering the description given, took the train to Namur. This afternoon they came back together."

George started violently, and the chair he grasped was lifted and fell again with a dull noise on the carpeted floor. Sir Eustace stared at him with a look in which there was no room for further wonder.

"The old man had taken off his beard. He had gone down in a rich fur overcoat. He came back in a common one. They went down without luggage, and returned with a new trunk."

"You understand, Sir Eustace?" asked the detective, when the story was complete.

"Not all of it. Translate the latter part of what he said."

The detective complied.

"And now, Sir Eustace," he continued, "I have to add that one of my men, acting on my orders, has picked the lock of that trunk and has found the overcoat worn by the suspected man on his journey down. I have received a dispatch from another of my men who followed to Namur by the next train, who tells me where the man called Walhaert was shaved. He has found also where the trunk and overcoat were bought, and we know by this time that Walhaert is at

the Hotel de Suede and that he is entered in the visitors' book there as John Hetheridge."

"For God's sake, Redwood, speak," cried Sir Eustace. "What does this amazing mystery mean?"

"I will speak to you when we are alone, Sir Eustace," George answered.

"Will you be good enough," said the baronet, addressing the detective, "to retire and to take these people with you? You need not leave the hotel until I have seen you again."

"You will remember, Sir Eustace," returned the detective, "that a little while ago you told me that I was a fool. I trust that before I leave you will see your way to the withdrawal of that injurious epithet."

"My good man," Sir Eustace answered, "for heaven's sake don't bother me now. Let me get to the bottom of this astonishing business. Now go, there's a good fellow, and we can settle whether you're a fool or no a little later on."

The detective withdrew with an air of dignity, taking his witnesses with him. The baronet and Redwood were left alone.

"Redwood," said Sir Eustace, "I can't stand this. I'm in such a state of amazement that I can't believe that I'm not dreaming. You knew this Walhaert was your father's murderer?"

"I knew it months ago, Sir Eustace."

"You knew it months ago?" The baronet fairly staggered under this new surprise.

"My mother knew it. Monsieur Dom had guessed it for years. We consulted together when I last went to England, and we resolved that silence was our only possible policy."

"Silence!" gasped Sir Eustace. "And why silence, in the name of heaven?"

"There was the best of reasons for it. Miss Hetheridge knew already of her father's villany, and was utterly crushed and broken by the knowledge."



"Miss Hetheridge! Her father's villany.\* What are we talking about, Redwood? Am I demented?"

"It was John Hetheridge who killed my father. It was John Hetheridge who under the assumed name of André Dom, lived at Upnor in disguise whilst he was supposed to be dead—lost in the Australian bush, thousands and thousands of miles away. Miss Hetheridge and I were engaged to be married when the knowledge of the truth came between us. My mother loved her, and still loves her tenderly, as dearly as if she were her own child."

His voice broke there, and for a while there was silence in the room. He controlled himself, and went on with a simple and manly earnestness which appealed more to the feelings of his hearer than any rhetoric or open display of emotion he had ever known.

"I have to tell you this to justify myself. If I had to lay down my life for her this moment, I could do it gladly. If anything that I could do or suffer could undo the past or wipe out its memory from her mind I would do it or endure it. I laid down all thoughts of vengeance on her father, for her sake. I would have helped the man who killed my father to escape from justice for her sake. She has suffered enough already. There is nothing left for either of us in the world, but I would rather die and go on dying every day than that she should be branded as the daughter of a murderer."

Sir Eustace in whose mind emotion had chased emotion whilst his companion spoke, moved forward suddenly, seized his hand and wrung it hard.

"I can understand," he said, "I can understand. I don't know if you are right or not, but before Heaven I'd have done the same."

"Sir Eustace," George besought him, clinging with both his own to the hand the baronet had given him, "it is in your power to help me or to overthrow everything. You saw the man less than an hour ago. You said yourself that he couldn't last long. He can at

the most drag out a miserable year or two, and is hardly likely to do that. I seemed to read death in his face to-day. Let him alone. Give the world no chance to point the finger of scorn at a child as innocent, as pure, as sorrowful——”

His voice failed him altogether, and his face was wet with not unmanly tears.

“Now,” said Sir Eustace, bringing his free hand resoundingly down upon the hands which held it, “if I go back on you, Redwood, may God do so to me and more also. I’ve only to declare that I’ve made a blunder, and I’ll do it. I’d like to hang the scoundrel all the same, but I won’t break the girl’s heart, and I respect your motive, Redwood, with all my soul. Here! We’ll have these beggars in at once. I’ll tell this detective fellow that I’m a fool in place of his being one. I’ll say I made a mistake.”

He dashed impetuously toward the door, but Redwood caught him before he could reach it.

“Be sure of your decision, Sir Eustace. Don’t act on impulse and regret it afterward.”

“Don’t act on impulse,” cried the baronet. “I never acted on anything else in all my life. Come in, gentlemen!”

He threw the door wide open and was disconcerted to find nobody in the corridor; but striding back to the mantel-piece, he rang a peal at the bell, which brought a garçon post haste into the apartment.

“There’s a detective here,” he said; “a fellow called Vandenberg, who is waiting to see me, somewhere in the hotel. Find him and send him here.”

The man had no knowledge of English, and Redwood was compelled to translate. The waiter retired with the message, and in a few minutes the detective reappeared.

“Mr. Vandenberg,” said Sir Eustace, “you told me a little while ago that I called you a fool. I did, and I’m very sorry for it. It was I who was the fool and not you. I thought I was on the track of a criminal.

and I find now that he's only a bankrupt who has gone mad over his losses. The poor beggar had grown a beard to disguise himself and was trying to escape from his creditors. My young friend here persuaded him to remove his disguise and to come back to Brussels under his own name. That's all about it, and if you'll call on me to-morrow, I'll give you a check for your trouble."

The detective retired, and on rejoining his comrades relieved himself by an apothegm not altogether original amongst Continental peoples.

"*Tous ces Anglais sont des toquès, plus ou moins.*"

"Stay with me, Redwood," said Sir Eustace. "Don't rest in the same house with that unutterable scoundrel. Leave him to himself. Let him live or die as Heaven decrees, but have no more to do with him."

"I must start for Liège to-morrow," George returned, "I am a day late already."

"Stay the night with me at least," Sir Eustace urged. "You're looking quite white and haggard. To judge by the mere looks of you, you might not have slept or eaten for a week."

"It's not quite so bad as that," George answered, "but I have made only one attempt to break my fast since I left England."

"Then we dine at once," said Sir Eustace, and he rang the bell to give his orders.

Half an hour later, when they were at table together, George learned that his bill was paid and that his belongings had been placed in the bedroom adjoining that of Sir Eustace. The worthy baronet opened a bottle or two of excellent wine, and exerted himself to be cheerful and companionable. The lad brightened a little under this friendly influence, and went to bed with a heart less sore than it had been now for many a day, but he reproached himself for having forgotten his trouble. It seemed to him as if he owed it a duty to Ellice never to be content while she remained unhappy.

He was sad enough in all conscience when he said his good-bys next morning.

"I shall make it my business," Sir Eustace said, at the door of the railway carriage, "to insure news of the fellow we're leaving behind here. I shall let you know if I hear anything decisive. I'll send you a wire. Good-by, my lad, and God bless you. I shall be off to town by this night's mail. Good-by."

Hetheridge was left to his own devices. The news of his whereabouts reached his creditors in London, and by their instructions an English detective crossed to Belgium and took up his quarters in the hotel, his duty being to guard against any future evasion, and to bring back the absconder so soon as the doctor pronounced him fit to travel.

It was abundantly evident to the doctor that Hetheridge had but one more voyage before him—the journey into that vast unknown which lies before saint and sinner, sage and fool. The man's mind was as blank as a dead-wall, and his vital organs functioned more and more feebly, until at last they ceased altogether, and the man's dark spirit passed away.

The evil that men do lives after them, and his death brought no lightening of the cloud which rested on innocent lives.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

IT was bitter winter weather in and about Wellsted. A black frost had settled over the Eastern Counties in the Christmas week and had continued without a break, into mid February. There had been six weeks' uninterrupted skating on the fens of Lincolnshire, the earth rang like iron to the tread. Day after day the sun shone brightly, seeming to have abdicated from one-half its powers and to diffuse radiance without warmth. At night the stars sparkled with an amazing frosty brilliance so that the firmament was glorious to behold. Old age sat crouching by the fire, but youth and sturdy manhood rejoiced in the bracing air and biting wind.

"I wonder, Sam," said 'Tilda, to her husband, as they sat on either side the trim and well-kept hearth at home, "that you ain't afraid to put that cold stuff on your stomach in such weather."

Sam had a great pot of his unfailing beverage before him and applied himself to it from time to time with evident relish as he pulled at his pipe.

"Use is second nature, 'Tilda," he responded. "Cold tea's been my best comfort this thirty year and more. It's the best tiddle under the sun. It's a blowin' pretty hard outside, ain't it?"

"I never saw such weather," said 'Tilda. "A body would think the world was locked up in frost forever."

"God bless your soul, my dear," Sam responded, "there's an end to everything unpleasant, just as there's an end to everything pleasant. When the frost does break we shall have spring here in the twinklin' of a bedpost. The harder the frost the brighter the spring, that's my experience." With this he arose

and, walking into the hall, returned with a short pilot-cloth overcoat.

"You don't mean to say," 'Tilda demanded, "that you're going out this time o' night and in this weather?"

"That's exactly what I do mean to say," Sam responded. "I'm goin' to throw an eye round Mrs. Redwood's house. I've seen that chap skulkin' about there three nights runnin', and I don't like the look o' things. It looks like mischief. If Master George was at home it would be another matter. I should feel safer then."

"A pretty lot o' good he'd be anywhere, your Master George," 'Tilda retorted, with her nose in the air. "I wouldn't even trust a dog with that young man."

"Why, 'Tilda," answered Sam, with a wounded start, "what's the matter with you?"

"Matter with me?" cried 'Tilda, hotly. "What's the matter with you? You go on believing in that good-for-naught. Thinkin' kindly of him and spendin' hours on writin' letters to him. I wouldn't demean myself by shakin' a stick at him. I wouldn't be seen in the same street with him. He's a heartless, good-for nothin' wretch."

"Why, 'Tilda," Sam answered strickenly, "what's come to you?"

"Oh," returned 'Tilda, "I've kept quiet long enough and I've got a right to speak at last. Mr. George Redwood can write as nice and soft and mournful as he chooses, but I know why he left Miss Ellice. I give her a piece of my mind the other day, and told her she ought to know better than wear the green willow for a scamp like that. She's got no proper pride."

"You know why he left her?" Sam answered. "I'd give a hundred pounds if I did."

"Very well," 'Tilda returned, "you can have the news for nothing. It's been under everybody's nose for months past, and we were all too blind to see it. You are all so taken up with this young man that I've no patience with any one of you."

"Well, come now," said Sam. "What is the reason?"

"It's as plain as the nose on your face," declared 'Tilda. "The reason is that he knew her father was going bankrupt before any of us and he dropped out in time. He cared for her as long as she had money, but when he found out that she wasn't going to be the catch he thought she might be, he drew out of it. You *are* blind if you can't see that, when it sticks out before you in plain daylight."

"'Tilda," said Sam, with a solemnity unusual in him, "you're mistaken. You never were more mistaken in your life. I know Master George better than you do, and a truer man never breathed in this wide world. There's more behind things than we know about."

"And I suppose," said 'Tilda, scornfully, "that you'll go on believing in him."

"If that's the only thing you've got agen him," Sam retorted, "there is no manner of a doubt I shall. I've known him ever since he was no higher than my elbow, and there isn't a squarer fellow breathing."

"All right," returned 'Tilda. "That's like you men. You can't see what's under your own noses."

'Tilda had always been one too many for Sam in the matter of argument, and in respect to ordinary questions he bowed to her opinions with an unquestioning reverence. Since the death of 'Tilda's maiden aunt, Miss Thoms, she had a fortune which equalled Sam's own, and from the hour of her inheritance she had grown more and more confident of rule, until her husband lived in a state of spiritual bondage equal to that of a devotee in the middle ages in the presence of her confessor.

"Well, 'Tilda," Sam admitted to pacify her; "I may be a fool. Perhaps I am, but you see, my dear, it's like this—I can't help it! If I thought, as you do, about Master George, I shouldn't care about anything in the world. It would take the relish out of every-

thing. And I can tell you there is no danger of my doing it. And I should take it as a favor, 'Tilda," he added this with extreme humility, "if you'd let this subject drop between us. I shall never believe as you do, and I don't expect to persuade you to my way of thinking, and so we'd better drop it, hadn't we?"

'Tilda deigning no further reply than was conveyed by a scornful toss of the head, and an inefinable squaring of the shoulders, as if preparing them to bear the weight Sam's imbecility imposed upon her, the husband struggled meekly into his overcoat, threw a black felt wide-awake on to his grizzled head, and after an uncertain glance or two, advanced and stooped down to kiss her. She becked a sour salute at him and settled in her chair.

"You and your George Redwoods."

Sam knew by experience that his sole chance lay in surrender, and so made off without reply.

It was after ten o'clock, a late hour for Wellsted. There was no moon and the stars, bright as they were, left the lower world in almost complete darkness. As Sam drew near Mrs. Redwood's house, he saw, or thought he saw, a figure standing near the gate, which at that time of night was invariably locked. Sam, to conceal his own approach, had chosen to walk along the strip of turf which bordered the lane, and his footing therefore, frost-bound as it was, gave no warning of his whereabouts. The shadow was so dense that, strain his eyes as he might, he could not be absolutely sure of the presence of the figure he suspected. He moved on tip-toe with indrawn breath, and whilst he was yet twenty yards away, saw the dim figure he suspected climb the gate. He stood still and held his breath to listen, but even then he could make out nothing, except that the shadows seemed denser in some places than in others, and that the gate gave a solitary click when the denser shadow seemed to drop from it. Sam moved forward with the utmost caution, and then, creeping step by step across the road, he



peered into the garden, and there for an instant made out quite clearly the outline of a man's head and shoulders, silhouetted against the sky.

At this he wormed himself over the gate with a secrecy equalling that of the suspicious stranger who had preceded him, but his foot, heavily shod, grated on the harsh gravel of the drive. He saw the head and shoulders turn and then the man was lost.

"Come," said Sam in a low tone, anxious not to disturb the inmates of the house. "Let's have a look at you."

The stranger made no reply to this invitation, but a slight rustle betrayed the fact that he had taken refuge behind a clump of bushes on the lawn. Sam dashed forward, but only to trip himself on the handle of a garden roller and to measure his length upon the turf. Before he had fairly recovered himself he heard stealthy footsteps on the drive behind him, then of a man hastily climbing the gate, and next light footsteps on the road. He groped his way back to the path and ran. He could hear the footsteps still before him when he had scaled the gate, but they were a hundred yards away by this time, and though he set out stanchly in pursuit, he had little hope of overtaking him. He ran himself to a stand-still in the first half-mile, for this was a form of exercise to which he had not been accustomed for many years, and when he paused to listen, except for his own laboring breath and wildly beating heart, the night seemed dumb. Even when his pulses ceased their riot and he could once more hold his breath to listen, not a sound broke the absolute stillness of the night. He retraced his steps, mopping his forehead as he went, and exercising his imagination vainly to find a reason for these nightly visits. On two previous occasions he had suspected the presence of an intruder, and that night's adventure had confirmed his doubts.

His way led past the house of Monsieur Dom, and seeing a light in his window, he must needs enter and

relate his news. The little Frenchman received him cordially, and listened with great interest to his narrative.

"I am going to be on the look out to-morrow," he concluded, "and I'll startle that chap if I find him there, you bet. I shan't give him a chance to put his maulers up. I shall land him a oner on the nut, like that old Hetheridge did me."

"Perhaps, my good friend," returned Dom, "you had better not. Perhaps, my good Potter, you had best find out who it is first."

"What's that got to do with me?" Sam retorted. "Whoever he is, he's got no right there, prowling round at night-time."

"I am not so sure that he may not have," Dom answered.

"I can't make you out at all," said Potter, staring in answer to the old man's melancholy smile. There were tears in Dom's light eyes.

"My friend," he said, laying a hand upon the other's arm. "I am an old bachelor, and when I was very young I was a young bachelor with a love affair. It never came to anything, and that is why I am sometimes sentimental. To marry is to bury sentiment, my good friend. To remain single is to be able to understand it in old age."

"Do you mean to say?" cried Sam. He failed to achieve his sentence, and sat with rounded eyes and open mouth.

"Yes," Dom answered, nodding his head emphatically. "I mean to say that that is very likely."

The emphatic nod caused the tears that stood in his bright eyes to brim over, and one glittering drop ran down either russet-pippin cheek and lost itself in the corner of his great gray mustache.

"Then, why the ——?" Sam began.

"Exactly, exactly, exactly," Dom interrupted. "Why the ——? It is a very sensible question. I will tell you why the ——, my excellent Potter. The

poor young man," he lowered his voice almost to a whisper, "the poor young man loves her with all his heart and soul. But—you shall not ask me why—there is a gulf between him and the girl. She is withering like a cut flower, and he is breaking his heart, but they can never come together."

"But why not, in the name of wonder?" Sam demanded.

"Ah," said Dom, "that is what I must not tell you. That is what I cannot tell you. The daughter of John Hetheridge and the son of George Redwood can never marry. Can never be anything to each other. You must ask me no more. I had no right to tell you this, but you are a good fellow, my good Potter, and you will say nothing about it. Promise me this?"

"Wait a bit," said Sam. A mere reflex of the old vacuous air of years ago was back upon him. "Just tell me this: Is it his being George Redwood's son——"

"And her John Hetheridge's daughter," Dom interrupted, still speaking in a whisper. "Yes, that is it."

"And is that *all* there is betwixt 'em?" Sam demanded, rising. "Why, I can set that right. She's no more Hetheridge's child than I am. She's my old mate, Bob Martin's little gell, she is. Why, God bless your soul alive, I've had her on my knees, and fed her with her feeding-bottle afore she was six weeks old. I've carried her hundreds and hundreds of miles before she could walk. So has 'Tilda. Used to wheel her about in a perambulator. Oh, I know who she is right enough. Poor Bob Martin. He was speared in his own house by a black fellow. Hetheridge found the kid and took her away with him. The only bit o' good he ever done in his life so far as I can learn."

Dom had risen to face him, and as Sam roared all this in that great voice of his, the little Frenchman held the table to prevent himself from falling.

"Can you bring any proof of this?" he asked.

"Proof," Sam shouted. "My word, I can. There's 'Tilda knows it. I know it. There's the Rev. Jordan Farrell knows it. Both me and 'Tilda told him eighteen years ago."

"But why did you keep silence all this time?"

"It was like this," Sam answered, "I should never have had much for her, though I was her natural guardian, mind you. Bob Martin bein' my mate, and him and me havin' stuck together, man and boy, for fifteen years—and Hetheridge was rich. We thought she'd have his money, and we put our heads together, 'Tilda and me, and the Rev. Jordan Farrell, and we agreed to hold our jaw, the three of us. Hetheridge knew as I knew, all along, and he knew as 'Tilda knew."

Potter, who was more excited than he was quite aware of, though he was far from guessing in what way his disclosure bore upon his favorite's happiness, was brought to an abrupt conclusion in the noisy torrent of his speech by the remarkable expression of Monsieur Dom's countenance. Monsieur Dom was not regarding him in the least, but was looking fixedly beside his shoulder as if he were fascinated by something which he saw there. Potter, guided by Dom's eye, wheeled slowly round, and there with arms wide outspread, with one hand holding the edge of the swaying door, and the other clutching the lintel, stood George Redwood. He swayed forward, and Sam, with one swift movement forward, caught him in both arms.

"I'm all right," said George a moment later. "Don't trouble about me. You're sure of what you've been saying, Sam?"

"I'm as sure," Sam answered, "as that I'm a livin' man. I'll swear it on the Holy Bible if there's one in the house. I beg your pardon, matey," he answered, swiftly and contritely. "I'd forgot as you was a foreigner."

"Sam," said George, laying hold of his great sunburned fist. "Is 'Tilda out of bed at this hour? Could I speak to her?"

"Yes, bless your soul," Sam answered. "She'd never dream of going to bed and leaving me abroad. You bet your sweet life she's up and waitin'."

"Come with me, both of you," said George. "There's no rest for me until I know the truth of this."

"But what's it all about?" Sam asked, in profound bewilderment. "What's it make any difference for whose little gell she is?"

Dom drew him on one side and whispered in his ear, and Potter fell back with a look of horrified amazement.

"Master George," he said, "this is a providence. That's what it is. It's a providence. If it hadn't ha' been for this night's work I should have took my secret to the grave with me."

'Tilda was mighty severe and cold at the sight of Master George, and had evidently a rod in pickle for Sam.

"What do three great hulking men want to come trapezing into a decent house this time of night for askin' fool's questions? No, she never was Hetheridge's daughter. She was Bob Martin's little girl. I've known that these twenty years."

To her utter and complete amazement George Redwood threw his arm about her and kissed her half a dozen times. She broke away scandalized, but Sam waved his hat in the air and shouted "Hooray" in a tear-broken voice.

"You're all mad together," exclaimed the outraged 'Tilda.

"Mad!" said George. "You're right about me for one, Mrs. Potter. I'm mad with joy."

And he made for her again, but this time she was on her guard, and defended herself with a splendid vigor and adroitness, whilst Sam blubbered and

guffawed by turns in abject surrender to his own emotions.

"Good-night, Mrs. Potter, and God bless you," said Redwood. "You and Sam between you have made me the happiest man in England. Come on, Sam, we'll go and rout out the parson."

"No," cried 'Tilda. "Not a step out of this house does he take this night. You've been drinkin', Sam."

"Cold tea, 'Tilda," Sam responded. "Nothing more."

"Come along, Sam," called George. "We'll see Farrell, and then we'll come back here and make a night of it. Eh, Mrs. Potter?"

But Sam stood rooted under wifely authority, and 'Tilda with scant ceremony bundled her visitors from the house. For the space of a quarter of an hour thereafter Sam said at intervals of a few seconds, with a face and voice of meek expostulation, "Now will you let me get a word in edgewise, 'Tilda?" and 'Tilda, without taking the slightest notice in the world of this reiterated appeal, clacked commination against male humanity in general, and Sam in particular.

"You'd give both ears to hear it," Sam said at last, when she had sunk in tears and handkerchief on the sofa, "only you won't let a cove get a word in edgewise. It's the most egstrawnary that ever happened," and with that he poured into her ear the story.

'Tilda had grown to be a little bit of a shrew and a little bit of a tyrant, and 'Tilda had inherited the respectable fortune of the maiden aunt, Miss Thoms; but 'Tilda was a woman after all, and had always kept a warm and tender corner in her heart for Bob Martin's little girl.

When Dom and George came back again, as they did in half an hour from the time of their departure, she kissed the young lover with a motherly heartiness, and blushed very prettily afterward.

"I've carried her in my arms, Mr. Redwood," she

said, sobbing, "and I thought you treated her most cruel. I couldn't bear the sight of you, if you'll excuse my saying so, but now I understand."

"George Redwood," cried Dom, with an accent more broadly foreign than any one had heard him use for years, "come and help me to carry the bottles. There's no such wine in the world. Or no," he exclaimed, suddenly arresting himself, "it will spoil the good liquor to move it. We will go up to my house, and we will drink a health together. Sam, you dog; you shall have no more cold tea to-night. Madam, can I find for you your shawl? Permit that I do myself the honor to offer you my arm."

What a walk it was along the frosty road with the laughing, excited voices ringing on the crisp night air, and the bright stars twinkling overhead! How warm and cozy glowed the bachelor parlor of Monsieur Dom, with its crimson shaded lamp and cheerful fire! How the old connoisseur gloried in his wine, and with what tender, friendly, and emotional hearts they pledged the future!

It was midnight when Mrs. Potter, warmer at the core than she was wont to be, escorted the hilarious Sam homeward, and was scandalized by his determination to dance a hornpipe in the star-lit road. Sam went back to his cold tea next morning, but at that hour a warmer vintage than was ever called from plant of Cathay or India warmed the cockles of his soul.

George and Dom were awake throughout the night, and before the winter dawn was gray, the young fellow was at home again, and had sent the early-rising maid with a message to his mother. He knelt beside her bed in the darkened room, and held her hand and moistened it with his tears, whilst he told the story. When all was told, he stole away, and the widow rose and drew on her *peignoir* with trembling hands, and fluttered into the room where Ellice lay despairing and waiting for the early dawn to usher in another hopeless day.

Picture, who can, the radiant joy that illumined the bleak darkness of the winter morning. To crash in stormy shipwreck upon an arctic coast, and wake to festal joy upon a tropic isle! To be entombed alive and fed on gall and wormwood, and to rise to find the rich sun beaming on a new-born world, and all the fruits of Eden ready to the hand.

**THE END.**



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